

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 2 FEBRUARY, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDBATCHERS

Vol. XIX No.2

February 1979

Contents

The Newsletter of 1978: Comments by Lavkumar Khacher.

Bird poisoning due to pesticides in the Nilgiris, by
R. Sugathan.

Childrens Page:

- (a) Letter from Prof. John C. Jacob.
- (b) Letter from B.A. Palkhiwalla.
- (c) Ship-hopping by Indira Kohli.
- (d) Shikha Gupta's list, by Thomas Gay.
- (e) Answer to query of Miss. Rekha Sukhla, by
Pradyumna K. Desai.

A Hawk and Crows by Mrs. Inga Willis.

Goldenbacked Woodpecker in Kutch by Indra Kumar Sharma.

Myna feeding on lizards by Indra Kumar Sharma.

Correspondence

Comments, by Thomas Gay.

Pariah Kite, by Abraham Verghese.

Our Contributors

Subscriptions

The Newsletter of 1978: Comments by Lavkumar Khacher

Rearing of the Common Cuckoo by Rufousbacked Shrikes,
No.12, Page 8

This record would have been "authentic" had the observers captured the young cuckoo and sent it to Bombay Natural History Society. I sympathise with those who are not motivated sufficiently to score ornithological points by killing birds. However, cuckoos are not difficult to rear and a live bird in the hand is as useful as a dead one. Field identification of a young cuckoo can always be doubted. Now to answer a few of the questions on pages 9 and 10.

Answer to query 1: Most certainly, only one of the five eggs would have been that of the parasite. It is a well known fact that cuckoo eggs very closely approximate those of the host. If there are more than one cuckoo eggs in a nest these would most likely be from different females. Laying more than one egg in a single nest would be self defeating in the economy of the parasite.

Answer to query 2: There is no question as to who pushed out the other contents of the nest. The cuckoo chick hatches earlier-usually-and its first act is to eject the eggs and even chicks if hatched earlier. Last May we found a plumbeous redstart's nest at Manali. There was one larger egg obviously not a redstart's. We regularly visited the nest. A couple of days later the cuckoo's (larger egg) had hatched. The next morning we found three eggs outside with the cuckoo snugly occupying the warm, well concealed nest.

Answer to query 4: Where closely related species occur in the same locality there often is a subtle sharing of the available resources. In Manali, for instance, we can hear the Indian cuckoo, the cuckoo, the Himalayan cuckoo and the little cuckoo-all very similar and all brood parasites. Quite obviously there has to be an adjustment as otherwise available resources of food and host species would be heavily taxed to each species disadvantage. Here is investigation for a doctorate thesis. Any takers?

Unusual behaviour of a roller, No.12, Page 10

It would be interesting to know how many people must have stopped to look at the beautiful bird in their midst. Were there other Guptes? Precious few I am sure. As for the unusual hour, rollers, and drongos do quite a bit of insect chasing at dusk. Infact sparrows have started keeping late hours, particularly when having young in nests, hunting around lights capturing insects attracted by them.

Mynas feeding on lizards, No.12, Page 12

Redvented bulbuls have been recorded feeding on small garden lizards. I've seen one doing so myself, so why not mynas who are very omnivorous birds?

Without comment, No.12, Page 13

I certainly do have some comments here! Holy men are quite firm in their conditions, how else can they expect their followers to accept their infallibility? It is seldom that one has seen a peacock mounting a peahen-it might be interesting to find out how many of us have done so.....

Incidentally, while I am on my subject of holy men, I might clear up another matter which causes much confusion. In 1975 we had Dr. Salim Ali visit us-or was it 1976-and at a press conference Mansarovar cropped up. Salim Ali said there were no swans there, only geese. The next day a Sanyasin of high respectability issued a long and indignant rebuttal stating that he had seen "Hans" there personally and that Salim Ali was talking nonsense. Both the sages were right. We do have "Hans" in Tibet but do not have Swans there! In Sanskrit, "Hans" is used for the barheaded goose. Like so many funny matters relating to English in India a confusion exists. Of course, the paper which published the Sanyasin's report did so in Gujarati and never bothered to inquire of Salim Ali. The learned doctor and the equally learned theologian might well find a lot to discuss about their visit to Kailas and Mansarovar but for these minor misinterpretations. Thus a large number of pious Hindus continue to question Salim Ali's and ornithology's statement that swans do not exist on Mansarovar and quite obviously these lovely birds feed on pearls!

Indira Kohli's request to Rahul, No.11, Page 10

Rahul's "Honeysucker" could well be the hen of the resplendant sunbird. Incidentally, even among adults we find some confusion between honeysuckers, sunbirds, and humming birds. Luckily few have heard of sugarbirds, and honeyguides.

Scarlet minivets, No.11, Page 12

Indra Kumar Sharma is sure a "male chauvanist". It perhaps just happened that Pankaj Kumar came across a flock of female scarlet minivets, though in all likelihood they could have been longtailed minivets. So why should it make the males "more hardy and dynamic"?

Ashy drongo in Bandipur, No.10, Page 13

The ashy drongo is a common summer nesting species in the middle altitudes of the Himalayas, and is a common species on the edges of forests there. In September it spreads out into the plains of India and concentrates particularly in hilly forest country. It is a common bird, as Serrao says, in the Borivili National Park. The same is true along the evergreen corridor forests of the Gir. In Gujarat the grey drongo takes up residence even in compounds where there are large shady trees.

While superficially confusing, it is decidedly a slimmer bird with a proportionately longer tail. It tends to do a lot of "flycatching" inside the crown of trees and seldom comes to the ground. The call is very distinctive, and once linked with the species a sure point of identity. Through field glasses the grey of this drongo's lower parts is distinct, and the white spot at the base of the bill-seen in the black drongo-missing.

A census of Breeding Birds of India, No.10, Page 13

While agreeing with Mrs. Inga Willis about the practical difficulties of conducting a bird census over so vast and thinly populated (birdwatcher wise) a land like India, we have a proposal of conducting a census of Sarus cranes in Gujarat. The modalities are being considered.

As for occurrences of grey jungle fowl, Nilgiri Verditer Flycatchers, etc. in Ooty's municipal area (page 15) this should cause no surprise when in a single garden in Chembur, a smoky suburb of Bombay, I was shown nests of tickel's blue flycatcher, a whitebrowed fantail flycatcher, a White-eye, and redwhiskered bulbul. I have seen golden orioles in trees near the Nanavaty Hospital, and a paradise flycatcher female in a tangled bush in the Palm Beach School compound in Napean Sea Road. In Rajkot we have peafowl nesting on house balconies, and jungle babblers come indoors to share breakfast in Baroda. The point is not to belittle disireabilities of Ooty which I would love to visit, but rather to highlight the important fact that even urban centers can have a wealth of natural history if only the inmates cared to maintain their neighbourhood green, and cared for indoor and balcony plants. There are some lovely climbers which could be planted in locations where there is little space for trees. These climbers could be trained up cement-concrete walls of highrise buildings, or made to grow over trellises across narrow lanes. All species of Ficus trees are ideal for avenues and for birds. Lets hope the Ooty municipality will take pride in its jungle fowl, Verditer flycatchers and the like. Even if most people are not aware of the birds or other forms of animal life around them their reason for visiting hill station and other such spots is precisely for those surroundings in which birdlife thrives.

Rare Tibetan Crane located in Ladakh, No.9, Page 8

The Cranes located nesting at Chusul, Ladakh by Prakash Gole and Shrikant Ingalhalikar lost their eggs presumably to Ravens. I counted a concentration of sixty of these magnificent crows at Chusul. This large concentration can mean serious problems for nesting birds in the area. Incidentally a few of the blacknecked cranes winter in a couple of inner valleys in Bhutan. They regularly did in the Apa Tani Valley of Arunachal Pradesh. Unfortunately they have been dissuaded from coming by fire arms now available to the tribals.

Birding at Dhensa Jheel (Kutch) No.9, Page 5

Could Shantibhai Varu (whom I know) please verify his identity of the redtailed chat? Though likely to be met with in Kutch it is not very common. Perhaps what he saw was a female of the Kashmir (correctly black) redstart. It is not usual to see the two together. Are the Australian Babul (*Prosopis juliflora*) known in Gujarati as "Pardeshi (foreign) Baval", if so they are not Australian but American. On page 6 Shantibhai mentions seeing "resident ducks, grey duck, and cotton teal". These birds need correct identification. In this area we have the following resident species of waterfowl: the cotton teal, the lesser whistling teal, the spotbill and the nukta. The former is the smallest, the latter the largest.

The end inside cover, No.6

Dear editor, I am curious to know what all these delightfully curvaceous letters convey. What lovely script!

(This advertisement from the Karnataka Government yields the handsome amount of Rs.400) Editor

Damage caused by barbets, No.6, Page 13

Prof. Kaneshwar Singh refers to barbets making a nuisance of themselves in "this part of the country". Which part please? He also suggests that parakeets do less damage than the green barbet. This is a singular observation and certainly calls for comment and perhaps study.

Ornithology in Bandipur, No.5

If death comes early in the tropics Madhav Gadgil has failed to note another reason for small clutch sizes in tropical species. In the tropics the breeding season is more extended. Birds raise two and even three broods. In colder latitudes and altitudes the favourable season is very short. In addition, in high latitudes summer daylight hours are long and permit more time for active food gathering, essential alas, as we all know for feeding more hungry mouths.

Prof. Gadgil is not quite fair to the male. If he realises that much of the territorial integrity is maintained by the male, his contribution to the welfare of the youngsters is equal to that of the female. Quite frequently cock birds feed incubating partners and during the period when chicks have just hatched, the hen covers the naked hatchlings to keep them warm or shaded as the situation may demand, and it is the cock who brings food for the youngsters and also for the mate.

In longtails the learned Prof. questions the wisdom of the peahens selecting cocks with the longest trains, but goes on to answering his question. It is perhaps like parents wanting their daughters to wed potential ulcer patients and those who will die of heart attack rather than more leisurely males who have reasonable chances of outliving their spouses thus preventing her from the calumny of widowhood. A longtailed resplendent peacock, an overweight, suited and cigar smoking executive - see the trend? This is a delightfully blended cocktail of science and pleasure.

Rare Pheasant located in Pakistan, No.3, Page 8

I know a couple of locations in Himachal Pradesh of the Western Tragopan. I'd given a note on this to WWF-India. Subsequently, the problem was referred to a Canadian biologist. The latest information is that he has confirmed the birds presence in an area near Manali which incidently is soon to be declared a wildlife sanctuary.

Hoopoes in High Himalayas, No.3, Page 9

I found hoopoes along water courses as high as 16,000' in S.E. Ladakh last August. It is quite startling to find this attractive bird in such bleak locations but the rich turf with insects and worms and the innumerable nesting holes provided by shattered rock faces and marine deposits provide everything important in a hoopoe's economy and so they are there. With the coming of autumn they fly across to the warm plains south of the Himalayas. I think Ladakh has the highest hoopoe nesting birds, as it has human settlements.

And that brings me to the end of my penance for having neglected you for so long. I would have written more but the first two numbers of Vol. XVIII are missing. And so, I wish you and all the readers of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers a New Year full of bird cheer.

(The Editor regrets that this piece was not included in the January issue)

Bird poisoning due to pesticides in the Nilgiris by
R. Sugathan.

It is shocking that bird mortality due to pesticides such as Chlorinated Hydrocarbons and Malathion are reported from the Nilgiris. The studies which I conducted during the last year on the biology of the Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) shows that it has got very high deposits of Chlorinated Hydrocarbons in its fatty tissues. During my study I collected five dead birds within and around the vegetable gardens of Coonoor. This was sent to the University of California for analysis. Dr. O.H. Fulmer who is working on toxicological problems of birds was kind enough to provide me with the analytical reports. The reports indicate that fatty tissues of various organs had deposits of about 75 mg/kg of the chemical.

Further investigations about the feeding habits of this bird in the Nilgiris made me conclude that the poison reached the bird through its food. During the dry season, when the soil is dry the earthworms come out of the soil. This provides the pied bushchat with a good meal. These earthworms were found to have a deposit of about 10 to 15 mg/kg of Chlorinated Hydrocarbons in them. This is not a fatal level for them. But when this was eaten by the birds regularly the concentration of this chemical becomes very high, and at a later stage this becomes fatal. When this chemical is sprayed on the vegetables a part of it falls on the ground. The dead leaves also fall down and mingle with the soil. This mixture is eaten by the earthworms and as a result the poison deposited in their tissues. When they attain a saturated level the birds die off. This unfortunately will be the fate of many other birds in this area.

It will be useful to conduct a study about chemical pollution in birds. The Industrial Toxicology Research

Centre at Lucknow is doing research on pollution by chemicals, but they are not making any studies on birds. It is good that The Director of IIRC Dr.C.N. Krishna Murti has agreed to render all help from his institution to conduct such a study. I hope that this will throw more light on bird toxicology in India.

Childrens Page

a) Letter from Prof. John C. Jacob, President, Zoological Club, Payyanur College, Edat, P.O. Payyanur 670306

.....This is a voluntary registered Society dedicated to Nature Education, functioning in the Northern part of Kerala with its headquarters in the Payyanur College. We have over 300 members. We publish a half yearly magazine called Myna in Malayalam. During the past 6 years we had been undertaking a programme of nature education through study classes, exhibitions, Nature camps, film shows and competitions for school children in this area. From last July onwards we are collaborating with the World Wildlife Fund-India in the matter of organising and programming the Nature Club movement in Kerala. We have at present about 40 nature clubs in Kerala and the number is slowly increasing. For those young people who go beyond the age of being NC members we have started another movement called Nature Action Groups. The first NAG will be opened in another college on the 4th of this month. The NAGs are meant for the study of nature. The members will help teaching the children and adults in the area on Nature. Also they will function as watchdogs and when nature gets spoiled or polluted in their area they will create public opinion about it and if necessary start an agitation.

b) Letter from B.A. Palkhiwalla, Leader Trainer, Maharashtra State Bharat Scouts and Guides, 79F, Road, Marine Drive, Bombay 400 020.

After reading your childrens column in the Nov.'78 issue of Newsletter for Birdwatchers, I thought of recommending to our young readers a small book published by the National

Book Trust, New Delhi. Its title is 'Watching Birds' by Mrs. Jamal Ara and the price is only Rs.1.50. It is available in all the major Indian languages.

c) Ship-hopping by Indira Kohli

A sailor has given me some very interesting information on birds sighted up to 500 miles from land out in the open sea. The interesting point about this is that the birds sighted are usually not gulls but relatively small land birds. He said that this is understandable for the Bay of Bengal with its island chain, but not for the open Arabian Sea where sailors explain the presence of such birds by the phenomenon of 'Ship-hopping'. It seems that some birds follow ships out to sea, and then fly to other passing ships, perhaps each time moving further out to sea. The sailor said that off-hand he could not find a pattern in the behaviour of the birds, and even if some test birds were ringed the findings would at best perhaps indicate the volume of sea traffic.

I wonder whether any of the Junior subscribers live at sea ports? You could perhaps ask sailors to try and identify these adventurous birds and find out a little more about them. Are they small enough to rest on flotsam, weeds? What do they live on while searching for other ships? Is it merely ship-hopping or is there a pattern.

I am sure other birdwatchers will be interested in your findings so why don't you forward them to me. (Indira Kohli, 36, Balbir Avenue, Dehra Dun 248001, U.P.)

d) Shikha Gupta's list by Thomas Gay (Page 7,8, January 79)

Why not have given him or her the names of the birds he or she has pretty accurately described? Obviously, house crow, house sparrow, wiretailed swallow, the next two probably, common myna, pied myna, the last, probably pied wagtail.

You might have used his/her imperfect list as an object lesson in giving further details. Eg. was the bird on the ground on a tree, or flying? Did it carry its body erect or horizontal? Length of tail in proportion to body? Did it walk, hop or run? And so on.

I suggest that you do this for all the incompletely detailed lists that you are likely to get.

e) Answer to query of Miss Rekha Sukhla by Pradyumna K. Desai

Miss Rekha Sukhla wants to know whether house sparrows throw out other bird's chicks from their nest. House sparrows which have become firmly established in one area or in a house, resent the presence of other birds and bully gentle creatures like the Indian robin. It is possible that they might have thrown out a chick of the robin while fighting for the possession of the nest site. As a rule house sparrows do not interfere with the nests of other birds.

A Hawk and Crows by Mrs. Inga Willis

I witnessed an unusual incident when attending the Ooty races this season. I was watching the horses down at the starting gate through binoculars when I became aware of about 15/20 Indian crows in the air, mobbing one of the big brown and buff hawks, with much noise. Suddenly there was an extra amount of noise and the hawk soared on above them all but bearing something in its claws, which it proceeded to let fall. It was a crow, stone dead. I did not actually see the strike, but presume it took place when I heard the sudden extra noise. Disregarding completely the clamour made by the crows, the hawk dropped down, collected the dead bird, and flew away with it.

I have never seen this happen before. Has anyone else? I am afraid I was not able precisely to identify the predator who did this, as there are many different kinds seen here.

Goldenbacked Woodpecker in Kutch by Indra Kumar Sharma

Mr. M.B. Khatri (December 78 issue) expresses surprise about the presence of a goldenbacked woodpecker in his garden in Kutch. The goldenbacked woodpecker together with such birds as small minivets, golden oriole, white-eye, pitta, and whitespotted flycatcher have been observed around the Indian desert in Oases, groves and large gardens. Infact the woodpecker has been observed in semi arid regions as well. So sighting of the goldenbacked woodpecker is not of any extraordinary interest.

Myna feeding on lizards by Inlra Kumar Sharma

Mr. Manjit Singh Dhindsa (NLBW, Jan) and Mr. V. Santharan (Dec. 79) refer to the common myna attacking wall lizards and garden lizards. I have also seen mynas attacking these lizards as also young jungle rats and a sick bat lying on the grass. Mynas are omnivorous and they live largely on figs, larvae, insects, and kitchen scraps, but occasionally take small animals also.

Correspondence

Comments by Thomas Gay

I have just received the January issue of the Newsletter on which I have small comments.

(1) R. Mukherjee's item, Page 11

Your typist has performed the astonishing feat of turning waterhens into munias! In the next issue, you must tell us how this was done.

(The typist says due to oversight, which is not a good enough explanation) Editor

(2) John Singh's item, Page 11

Line 2, "next" should surely be "nest".
(Agreed) Editor

(3) Replies to R.E. Hawkins (Page 9,10)

Neither Desai nor Rai seems to have considered the possibility of Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis merulinus*) whose "kaveer....kaveer....kaveer...." is extremely melancholy, plaintive and "love-lorn".

(4) I especially enjoyed Y.M. Rai's "Birdwatching at Jaipur", but have one criticism: he doesn't make clear which of the observations refer to "last week of May" and which to "first week of January 1978" (and is it May 78 or May 77). The two periods belong to widely differing

ornithological sensus.

(Thomas Gays comments has made it unnecessary for the Editor to include an Errata for the January issue)

Pariah Kite by Abraham Verghese

I have a few comments to make on Mr. Santharam's observation on Pariah Kite, *Milvus migrans* (Nl xix (I):6). The soaring and circling group of kites he saw was probably resident and not migratory as 'guessed' by him, for prior to roosting in non-nesting season these birds have the habit of soaring in circles in several hundreds. Later they break up and move to their roost, a tactic in all probability to ward off enemies, though a precise explanation is rather difficult. Further Mr. Santharam expressed "but I don't think a group of about 120 birds are commonly met with", which may be true perhaps as far as Adyar Estuary is concerned, but in Bangalore I have counted up to 600-800 in single groups many a time.

The observation on Sunbird is interesting and can form a framework for a small project study on attracting them.

Our Contributors: Their addresses

Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, 14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360 004.
 Mr. R. Sugathan, 103, Petersburg, Coonoor, Nilgiris.
 Prof. John C. Jacob, President, Zoological Club, Payyanur College, Edat, P.O. Payyanur 67306.
 Mr. B.A. Palkhiwalla, Leader Trainer, Maharashtra State Bharat Scouts and Guides, 79F, Road, Marine Drive, Bombay 20.
 Mrs. Indira Kohli, 36, Balbir Avenue, Dehra Dun 248001, U.P.
 Shri. Thomas Gay, Dev Kunj, Prabhat Road, Poona 411 004.
 Mr. Pradyumna Desai, T. Kheteshwar Plot, Bhavnagar 364002.
 Mrs. Inga Willis, The Club, Ootacamund 643001, Nilgiri Hills.
 Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagwati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur 342020.
 Mr. Abraham Verghese, 7, Lakshminah Road, Ulsoor, Bangalore 8.

Subscriptions for 1979 have been received from:

Mr. B. Sreenivasan, "Kalpana", 4, V. Palaniswamy Naidu Street, Avanashi Road, Coimbatore 18, Rs.15; Mrs. Joseph, Mashobia, Quail Hill, Coonoor-1, Rs.16; Mr. Y.M. Rai Gani, 414, W. Kutchery Road, Meerut 250001 (1980), Rs.15; Brig.J.P. Anthony, "Kusumum, B-116, Sainikpuri, Secunderabad 500594, Rs.15; Shri. Syed Asad Akhtar, 151, Sindhi Society, Chenbur, Bombay 71, Rs.10; Dr.A.K. Dutta, 64, New Baradwari, Janshehpur 831001, Rs.50; Shri. A.P. Gupte, Friends Rural Centre, Rusalua, Hoshangabad, M.P.461001, Rs.15; Miss Nina Malhotra, 2, Gokhale Road, Calcutta 700 020, Rs.10, Lt.Col. J. Roberts, P.O.Box 170, Kathmandu, Nepal, Rs.15; Shri. Thomas Gay, Dev Kunj, Prabhat Road, Poona 411 004, Rs.20; Abraham Verghese Esq., 7, Lakshminah Road, Ulsoor, Bangalore, Pin 560 008, Rs.15; Br.A. Navarro, S.J. St. Xavier's High School, L. Tilak Mark, Bombay 1, Rs.15; Miss J. Chapman, St. Hilda's Hostel, c/o. Monica's Jr. College of Education, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, Rs.15; The Ornithologist, Old Insedary Building, Veterinary College Camps, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 500 030, Rs.15; Mr. Ravindra Dayal, 51E, Siyan Singh Park, New Delhi 3, Rs.15; Mr. Narayan Deb, The Blue Mountains School, Ootacamund, Nilgiris, 643001, Rs.15; Mr.G.L. Keswani, C-138, Kirti Nagar, New Delhi 110 015, Rs.15; Mr. Sumant R. Shah, A 20, Shakti Sadan, Lamington Road, Bombay 400 007, Rs.15; Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, 24/1337, Behind G.P.O., Trivandrum, Kerala 695001, Rs.15; Mr. Vivek Kunte, 11, Kuppuswamy Street, T'nagar, Madras 600 017;Rs.15; Mr. P.A. Narielwala, Breach C ndy Gardens, Bhulabhai Desai Road, Bombay 400 026, Rs.15; Mr.P.D. Gupta, Deputy Director-in-charge, Zoological Survey of India, Gangetic Plains Reg. Stn., Rajendranagar, Road No.7, Patna 16, Rs.15; Mr. M.B. Krishna, 10, Ranga Rao Road, Shankarpuran, Bangalore 4, Rs.10; Mr. V.J. Rajan, 13, Ayalur Muthia Mulali Street, Kondlithope, Madras 1, Rs.15; Mr. Winston Creale, "Bossen", Silver Beach Estate, Juhu, Bombay 54, Rs.10; Mr. Anil Sadashiv Mahabal, 1935, Madewale Colony, Sadashiv Peth, Poona 411030, Rs.15; Mr. Suchitra Bhattacharya, 16, West Road, Santoshpur, Calcutta 700 075, Rs.15; Mr. Ashok Kumar Sharma, 54, Avinash Path, Dhuleshwar Garden, Kanpur, Rs.15; Mr. K. Nirmalavel, 224, West Cotton Road, Tuticorin 638003, Rs.15; Mr.M.H. Himmatsinhji, Jubilee Ground, Ghuj-Kutch, Rs.30 (two years); Smt. Sushila Mehta, 11, Firadeus Manzil, B nd Stand, K. Bhabha Road, Bandra 50, Rs.15; Mr. M.S. Ramanooorthi, 5/15, Middle Street, Mulikondan 609592, Rs.15; Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagwati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jolhpur 342020, Rs.15;

Mr.N.G. Pillai, Belle-Vue, Dewan's Road, Ernakulam, Kerala 682016, Rs.15; Mr. Arun Yalati, Rishi Valley School, Rishi Valley P.O., Chittoor District, A.P. 517352, Rs.15; Dr.A.S. Nagarkatti, 2/17, Sector 9, Bhilai 490 004, Rs.15; Mrs. Sushila Bai Alige, Fairmont Porter Avenue, Coonor 643101, Rs.30 (for two years); Mr. G.N.S. Robertson, "Martindale", Easton Royal, Pewsey, Wiltshire, England, Rs.25; Flt.Lt.S. Rangaswamy (Retd.), 21-E, HIG Flats, Thiruvanniyur, Madras 600 041 (Change of address), Mr. Suresh Kumar, Elanor House, Thycaul, Trivandrum 14, Rs.15; Mrs.P. Slater, The Anchorage, Coonor 643101, Rs.15; Mr. Lavkumar Khachar, 14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360 004, Rs.15, Mr. Lalsinh M. Raol, 2/18, Govt. Quarters, Exhibition Ground Jamnagar 361001, Rs.15; Mr. Pradeep J. Pandya, Vidyut, Near Fire Brigade Station, Sadar, Rajkot 360 001, Rs.15; Mr. Kishore K. Gohil, Viral, 4, Jagnath Plot, Rajkot 360 001, Rs.15; Mr. S. Ganesh, Observatory (IIG), Colaba, Bombay 400 005, Rs.15; Mr. Sureshwar Gupta, c/o. B. Gupta, 153, DE, Sir Syed Street, Khagaul, Patna, Bihar, Rs.15; Mr. L. Namassivayan, 13/111, Kattukandi Paramba, Kammath Lane, Kozhikode 673002, Kerala, Rs.15.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 3 MARCH, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol.XIX No.3

March 1979

Contents

Some birds of the Kathmandu Valley, Part I, by Jasper Newsome.
Birdwatching at Kolleru lake by, S. Ashok Kumar IAS.
Miscellaneous notes, by ZF.

Correspondence

Unusual breeding date of the Indian Little Grebe and the Rare Occurrence of a Coot breeding at Khandala, by A. Navarro S.J.
Severe weather, by S.K. Reeves.
What can this be? by Dr.A.K. Dutta.
News from Ajmer, by J.T.M. Gibson.
Poor Editing, by Yado Mohan Rai.

Our Contributors

Subscriptions

Some birds of the Kathmandu Valley, Part I, by Jasper Newsome.

The Kingdom of Nepal, though covering a mere fraction of one per cent of the land area of this planet, boasts a bird population consisting of more than 10% of the species of the world. There are several reasons for this phenomenon, first being the position of Nepal on the watershed of more than one of the great zoogeographical regions of the earth. To the north and west lies the Palearctic zone, covering Tibet, Siberia, the Middle East and Europe. To the south lies the Oriental zone of peninsular India - and to the East the zone of life forms characteristic of Burma, Indochina, and on out to the Philippines. Although overlapping, these zones do have their own fairly distinct avifaunas. Another prime reason for the richness of Nepali bird life is that Nepal's vertical geography, rising as it does from less than one thousand feet above sea level to over 29,000 feet encompasses all the biotopes from tropical to alpine.

Recently I was fortunate enough to spend several months in Nepal, chiefly in the Kathmandu Valley, so I shall confine the scope of this paper to that small but fruitful area. Perhaps the best single locale near Kathmandu is the area around the Botanical Gardens at Godaveri to the south east of the city, and on the forested slopes of the 9,000 feet hill, Phulchowki, above it.

Almost the first birds one will notice at Godaveri are the Himalayan Tree Pie and the Grey Bulbul and perhaps the Red-billed Blue Magpie, though one is sure to see this shortly after on the lower slopes of Phulchowki. One may see Nuthatches usually first noticed by their calls. Around Kathmandu there are the Velvet-fronted and Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches, in orchards and groves, and at Godaveri one is sure to see the White-tailed Nuthatch. White-cheeked Bulbuls abound and in the winter months one comes across large, active and noisy parties of these birds working the forest. The Grey Tit is to be found in the lower and more urban areas and on Phulchowki one will see the Yellow-checked Tit, the Green-backed Tit and the Redheaded Tit. Occasionally at a high altitude here one meets with the Coal Tit, though this is a bird of the conifer regions, whilst the covering of these hills is largely of oak and rhododendron with an undergrowth of dwarf bamboo.

Among the genera most rich species in Nepal are the flycatchers (*Muscicapa*) with around thirty species. The most conspicuous flycatchers are the fantailed: the Yellow-bellied, and Whitethroated Fantail Flycatchers both occurring, the former chiefly on passage in spring and autumn. At Godaveri one may also see the Grey-headed Flycatcher, a resident species and possibly the Paradise Flycatcher though I have not seen it myself in this locality. Most of the flycatchers are migratory

and absent in winter, for example, the blue Verditer Flycatcher, one of the commoner conspicuous birds of these forests in summer. I have seen the Beautiful Niltava, one of the most striking flycatchers, in the Botanical Gardens in February, and near by I have seen the Orange-gorgetted Flycatcher in winter too.

Once on a trip to the top of Phulchowki from 8th-10th October, I noticed very few adult flycatchers (mostly Verditer), but I did see a very large number of immature birds of the Sooty and Brown species and even a few of the rarer Ferruginous Flycatcher. Also seen on this trip were the Little Pied, the Slaty Blue and the White-browed Blue Flycatchers.

One of the most characteristic birds of Nepal is Hodgsons Tree Pipit, a ground-haunting bird that flies up into the nearest tree at the slightest throat, calling a thin "tseep". It is quite distinct from the Tree Pipit having a much darker plumage and stronger markings on the breast, as well as a clearer eyestripe and louder harder call than the latter, which is any way not a common bird in Nepal. Further up on the slopes of Phulchowki one will meet the Upland Pipit. Larger and paler than other pipits, with a distinct white eyestripe, it is a solitary bird most likely to be encountered in the middle of the forest road that goes to the summit of Phulchowki. In the same locality one is sure to see the Orange-flanked Bush Robin, flitting before one in a confiding manner. Once in autumn I also saw the Rufous-bellied Bush Robin here and on the northern side of the valley have seen the Blue Chat and the Golden Bush Robin, both in winter. The Himalayan chain is the epicentre of distribution for the great thrush family and Phulchowki is well endowed with species of these genera. In winter one may see many species both of Ground and Laughing thrushes as well as true thrushes. The Redheaded-Ground Thrush breeds on Phulchowki but leaves in winter, when most of the other species arrive. Large and noisy flocks of the White-throated Laughing Thrush, and Greyheaded Thrush and the White-collared and Greywinged Blackbirds are all to be found in winter, as are the Speckled Mountain Thrush (White's) and the Plain backed and Long-tailed Mountain Thrushes. Present through out the year is the beautiful and mellifluous Whistling Thrush one of the most archetypally Himalayan birds.

The genus *Phylloscopus*, one of the most difficult groups of birds in the field, consisting as it does of many very small and similar olive green birds, is also well represented here. On Phulchowki one will encounter the Orange barred Leaf Warbler, the Grey faced Leaf Warbler and the Plain Leaf Warbler, also less commonly the Dull green and Tickell's Leaf Warblers.

One bird I am always pleased to meet with here is the Maroon Oriole which one first encounters above 5,000. Slightly higher up one first encounters the Hoary Barwing, with its loose untidy appearance and the tiny Nepal Parrotbill an enigmatic little bird of the Ringal, or dwarf bamboo. At no season can one go into the oak and rhododendron forests around Kathmandu and fail to encounter the Black Capped Sibia. This bird, with its bright chestnut plumage is so omnipresent and vociferous as to be almost a bore. I took a party of British bird-watchers to Phulchowki once and they were all quite pleased to "tick" this species when we first met with it, but within half an hour people were raising their binoculars on a fleeting bird only to exclaim "just another damned sibia!" No account of these hilly forests would be complete without mentioning the Woodpeckers, the commonest of which seems to be the Rufousbellied Sapsucker, a bird which bores holes in the oak in which to collect sap, a habit which is parasitized by many other birds, including the Sibias. One may also see the Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker, the Brownfronted Pied, and the Small Crimsonbreasted Pied Woodpeckers.

(To be continued)

Birdwatching at Kolleru lake, by S. Ashok Kumar IAS.

Kolleru lake is a natural depression of land between the Krishna and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh with a water spread of 348 square miles. It serves as a drainage reservoir receiving an inflow of 1,10,920 cusecs from several drains while its discharge through Upperteru (a tidal stream 39 miles long joining the Bay of Bengal) is 6650 cusecs. During the monsoon season when there are heavy rains, the lake swells, inundating surrounding lands and villages. The lake is a good source of fish, like Cat fish, Climbing perch, Murrail and also of good sized prawns. There is an abundance of tadpoles, toads, frogs, snails and a variety of aquatic insects and larvae in the lake. A large number of birds, including migratory birds visit the lake and make it their habitat and breeding ground in view of availability of food and the vast expanses of water plants, weeds, tall grass and floating vegetation which are congenial for breeding.

Equipped with a 20' x 50' Zenith field binoculars and the "Book of Indian Birds" by Salim Ali, I decided to visit the lake on the 22nd January. The sky was clear and the weather pleasant when we set out in a convoy at 7.20 a.m. The cool breeze forecast a promising day. Motoring on Kaikalur Road, we observed on either side, swarms of yellowthroated sparrows, circling in groups over paddy fields and settling on hay stacks. While nearing Manur Village, we noticed a lone Wood Sandpiper on a canal bund ridiculously moving its hind portion up and down. We next turned our attention to the Black Drongos perched on a telegraph wire ahead of our convoy. Two of them

swooped to the ground to nab at their juicy prey. We cruised slowly along the road and found Common Green Bee-eaters, Indian Robins, Redvented Bulbuls, and occasionally the Blue Jays on their favourite place of perching, the telegraph wire. A group of Common Mynas were busy picking insects in the paddy field. We covered some distance and saw a White-breasted King Fisher stationed on a roadside palmyrah tree. An Indian Robin, tossing its jaunty cocked tail hopped from the termite mound to the spider's web on a Prosopis plant. The morning hours were thus full of bird life.

We disembarked from our vehicles at the 10th mile near Chinnayedlagadi. The Village Magistrate of Siddapuram, is a keen enthusiast of birds and takes a lot of interest and pride in conducting visitors to Kolleru lake area and showing its avifauna. I wanted him particularly to accompany us during our trip. He arrived at the bridge a little later and all of us proceeded to the embarking point where two country boats were kept ready. These boats with a carrying capacity of ten passengers are extensively used in Kolleru lake to ferry villagers, goats, poultry, and transport agricultural produce and other daily needs. Kolleru lake is generally 8' to 10' deep throughout except where drains have been excavated in the lake bed. The boats glide on the placid waters of the lake by a thrust of bamboo poles. The boatman sticks the bamboo pole into the lakebed at an angle, and traverses from one edge of the boat to the other, thus giving a gentle push.

The young boatmen, feeling honoured by our visit, promised to take us to the heart of the lake and the feeding grounds. We settled in the boat with high hopes and expectations. Not far from the embarking point, were a flock of Cattle Egrets with white plumage stalking along the grassy edge of the drain. The floating vegetation chiefly consists of aquatic weeds like Ipomia, Lily and Water Hyacinth. There are extensive areas consisting of tall grass, huge reeds and rushes. Flocks of Pied Mynas and sparrows settled among the reeds, swiftly dispersed on our approach. The Taluk Public Relations Officer was quick to click the camera while they were in flight. After gliding noiselessly some distance among the reeds, we were excited to locate, for the first time, a pair of handsome Purple Moorhens pecking at reed stems. The conspicuous bald red forehead, blue tail and long red legs rendered their identification easy. The white patch in the hind portion visible every time the tail flicks up is another clue to its identification. Hastily they disappeared into the dense reeds at the sight of our approaching boat. About 200 yards from the point where the Purple Moorhen made their exit, I could perceive some movement in Ipomia weeds. With a sweep of my 20' x 50' binoculars, I could locate a Green Shank with its characteristic long beak slightly upcurved, and long olive green legs. Unlike the Purple Moorhen, the Green Shank is not a shy bird, and it obliged me with a good pose at close quarters. Farther away among the reeds, we could observe the Little Stint picking

tiny insects. Our party was nearing Motevari Lanka when the village Magistrate of Siddapuram pointed in the direction of fields where there were flocks of Little Stints. Our efforts to approach them stealthily to take a snap proved futile. We therefore set out for Gudivaka Lanka. After crossing the fresh water tank and entering the lake waters, I could make out a black outline of a bird at a distance. Focussing my binoculars I could distinctly see the Little Cormorant perched upright on a stake drying itself with outstretched wings. Its glistening black colour and size has earned it a local name "water crow". While passing by the row of stakes standing like soldiers, we noticed several teals in flight against the clear blue sky. Among the Ipomia growth, we came across a pair of Purple Moorhen jerking their heads and flicking their tails. It was 11-00 a.m. when we landed at Gudivaka Lanka. After settling a land dispute between two sections of the villagers, we set out for Prathikodu Lanka. Beyond the tall grass, we had a glimpse of a cormorant in flight. After negotiating the bend, we saw at a distance of 200 yards, three cormorants and a lone Cattle Egret perched on fish stakes. Out of the tall grass came the squeaky noises of Pied Mynas which abruptly took to flight on sighting us. We advanced to find a Redwattled Lapwing. Yonder on the grassy bund we could see rows of Cattle Egrets alongside grazing buffaloes, and two egrets were riding upon their backs with impunity. At a point one kilometer from Prathikodu Lanka, hundreds of teals were sighted whirling and settling among Ipomia vegetation. After skirting the nylon nets spread between bamboo poles two feet above the water surface, we headed for Prathikodu Lanka our lunch station.

At 4.00 p.m. we set out on our return journey. After paddling our way through the still waters of the lake some distance, we saw several flocks of coots, the commonest of the water birds. It is very difficult to make any successful approach to these birds as our boat was not camouflaged. Yet we tried to silently and stealthily advance, but alarmed, the birds, in their characteristic style skittered along the water to take off, half running and half flying. The ivory white pointed bill and frontal shield diagnostic of these birds distinguishes them from other birds. Among the "Kikkisa" grass, the ubiquitous sparrows kept up their chorus.

We were approximately one mile from Bujabalapatnam our disembarking point, when we saw a vast expanse of weeds and rushes. While our boat was slowly finding its way through this mass of vegetation, I surveyed the area with my binoculars. I could locate several pairs of Purple Moorhens, stalking and skulking through the reedy swamp and, alarmed by our approach, they scuttled into cover. The large numbers confirmed that the swampy area is their home ground. While our boat was heading towards the disembarking point, Night Herons and Cattle Egrets were present in large numbers as if to bid farewell to us.

Miscellaneous notes, by ZF

Environs of Madras: On 23rd January we motored up to Madras. The beautiful countryside around Madras, the large open meadows bordering the lagoons and inland creeks were a revelation, and we had no idea that the environs of this city were so attractive. The inland creeks particularly are excellent habitat for birds. In one brackish lake just a couple of miles away from Mahabalipuram there was a massive collection of water birds of all kinds, including Brownheaded and Blackheaded Gulls, Cattle, Little, and Large Egrets, Gullbilled terns and a number of Caspian Terns with their handsome red bills. When one sees an assortment of this dimension one realises afresh how productive our back waters are, and how important it is to save them from any kind of pollution or physical damage which would affect their productivity.

Thirukkalukundram: One morning on the way to Vedanthangal we passed the famous hills of Thirukkalukundram (See K.K. Neelakantans article, Newsletter, April 1977) where the Garudas are supposed to come from Banaras every morning. We did not see the Neophrons but we were glad to find that the hillside flora was well protected. Romulus Whitaker informed us that in the surrounding countryside there were a few blackbuck, and the Forest Department had been successful in reforesting the locality with entirely native species of trees. This stretch of country consisting of hills, grasslands, and tanks can well qualify as a blackbuck sanctuary, and I believe that some moves are afoot to have this proposal processed. Incidentally we saw a Black Drongo taking a ride on a mans back in this area-something which I have never seen before, and which speaks well for co-existence between man and birds.

Vedanthangal: Vedanthangal as expected provided a wealth of birds, and the high embankment, well wooded with trees, is a pleasant promenade from where the birds can be seen without disturbing them. The telescope in the watch tower was fortunately functioning, and we had a good look at birds far away. The paddy fields and other cultivation surrounding Vedanthangal provides evidence of the excellent fertilising properties of bird droppings or guano. As is well known from the earliest times the villagers surrounding Vedanthangal have recognised this fact and it is largely because of the protection they have provided, that Vedanthangal remains the excellent sanctuary that it is today.

Jack Snipes (Capella minima) on Dodda Gubbi Lake: Not being a shikari I am no good at identifying snipe and such like birds. But the three creatures on Dodda Gubbi on first February 79 were unmistakable. Salim Ali (Handbook Vol.12 page 291) says that their "calls are not recorded in India". I can claim to have heard a very distinct whistle as one of the birds took off.

Pale Harriers: Opposite our house is a large field which is under ragi and beans during the monsoon but which is not cultivated in the dry months as there is no water supply. Every year we have seen harriers quartering up and down in this area, occasionally pouncing on insects

and rodents and on whatever is available in the way of food. This year has been a particularly dry one because there have been no rains at all in December or January. I watched one bird going back and forth for a full ten minutes without being able to find any food. Birds obviously cannot expend unlimited energy in finding their food and I was sorry to see that the harrier has left the locality and gone away to what I hope is more productive land. There is a Marsh Harrier flying over and around the Dodda Gubbi Lake and this bird obviously is doing much better than its cousin who had to rely entirely on terra firma for food.

Correspondence

Unusual breeding date of the Indian Little Grebe and the Rare Occurrence of a Coot breeding at Khandala, by A. Navarro S.J.

My companion in birdwatching, J. Hernandez often goes to Khandala for weekends and never misses the chance to survey the Khandala Pond. At the beginning of December he noticed a pair of Little Grebes with two young chicks swimming by their side. He believed that the chicks were about 4 to 6 days old. This seems surprising because from my experience I have always believed that these birds breed after the monsoon from September to October.

On checking the breeding seasons from literature I found that it varies in different parts of the country depending on the rainfall and suitable breeding conditions. It has 2 main seasons, in Kashmir and North Peninsular India from April to October, and in the Southern part of India and Sri Lanka from December to February.

Hernandez also discovered a Coot swimming along with a single chick which appeared to be of the same age as the young Grebes. I have seen Coots very often in this pond but I have never seen a nest or a chick.

Severe Weather, by S.K. Reeves

The weather here has been very severe for the last few weeks, with quite a lot of ice, snow and bitter winds. It was interesting to note that as soon as we experienced these hard weather conditions, the hard-weather fowl arrived- Goosanders, Red-breasted Mergansers, Scaup, Golden Eye, and a fine male Smew. We do not get many Smew here on the East Coast, and males are something of a rarity. There was also quite an influx of Woodcock. Two or three being seen in places where they are generally not seen. A friend's cat brought one in, which, happily, was rescued unscathed, and I put one up from the side of a main road.

A quite unusual number of Hen Harriers are evidently wintering locally. They are frequently seen on our home commons and marshes. As many as three, five, and seven have been seen in the air at the same time. They are almost wholly females. We have never seen more than one male at any one sighting.

Last Saturday, a party of us went by coach to Peter Scott's place at Welney on the Ouse Wahses to see the wild Bewick's and Whooper Swans and other wildfowl.

It was a wonderful sight to see 300-400 of these grand swans. There are supposed to be about 2500 of them this winter, scattered about the general area. They come every year to this specially prepared winter refuge, where they are protected and fed.

Another bird which seems to have come in quite well this winter is the Hooded Crow. We generally see it down on the marshes in company with two or three Carrion Crows. This morning one flew across the road ~~just~~ in front of us on the outskirts of Holt.

What can this be? by Dr. Dutta

On 7th December at 11 a.m. I stopped at Pawapuri (on N.H. 31 between Bihar-Sheriff and Bukhtiarpur towards Patna) to have a look at the Jain temple located in the middle of a large tank. A bridge leads to the temple.

The tank was overgrown with vegetation. I saw a large number of water birds in the tank including Purple Moorhens, Indian Moorhens, Bronze-winged Jacanas, Paddy Birds, Large, Intermediate and Little Egrets, a few White Wagtails and a couple of Shovellers.

The most prominent birds were, however, a species of small duck which I could not identify. They were of the size of village hens and uniformly brown in colour rather darker above. Though the tank was full of them they appeared to be in separate flocks of 20 or 30 each. They seemed to be in a state of nervous agitation constantly on the alert and emitting a continuous Peee-pee-pee call. Individual flocks would take off suddenly and settle down again after a short flight. In slow flight they had a drooping appearance.

I could not get the answer from Salim Ali's Book of Indian Birds. The nearest resemblance was that of White-eyed Pochard but I did not observe the white irises nor the white patch on the belly. I may, however, be mistaken on these points. I shall be grateful if any reader can enlighten me.

News from Ajmer, by J.T.M. Gibson

There seem to be more different birds about than I remember before - perhaps the result of an orchard having grown up on one side of the house. For about a week, some time ago, I had in my garden an Ashy Swallow-shrike. Though further West than Salim distributes it, I think there was no doubt: the call and colouring were unmistakeable. Though it is fairly common, the Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker was in my garden for the first time last week. The Goldenbacked is an occasional visitor. I have also had a visit for the first time from

a Magpie Robin, so common in Dehra Dun, but very unusual here. I hoped it might stay and charm me with its song, but it has gone.

Poor Editing, by Yado Mohan Rai

The editors scissors are famous. Reading through the article, "Birdwatching at Jaipur", in the January issue of the Newsletter, I noticed a sentence which does not carry the sense I intended. It is the last sentence in the last paragraph on Page 2. The sentence, instead of the printed one, should have read as follows: "It seemed to me that each evening these buntings returned to their night roost in the hills while each morning they came to feed in a patch of grass and weeds.... Bhaba hostel."

Our Contributors: Their addressess

Mr. S. Ashok Kumar IAS, Joint Collector, No.10-3-283/5, Humayun Nagar, Hyderabad 500 028.

Fr. S.J. Navarro, St. Xaviers High School, L. Tilak Marg, Bombay 1.

Mr. S.K. Reeves, 6, Town Close, Holt, Norfolk, England.

Dr. A.K. Datta, 64, New Baradwari, Jamshedpur 831 001.

Mr. J.T.M. Gibson, Shanti Nivas, Gulab Bari, Ajmer 305 001.

Mr. Yado Mohan Rai, 414, W. Kutchery Road, Meerut 250 002.

Subscriptions for 1979 have been received from:

Mr. A.C. Soundararaj, Srinivasa Nilayam, 79, Tamizhagam Road, Dotacamund 643001, Rs.15/-; Mr. P.D. Misra, High Court, Gauhati 781001, Rs.15/-; Mr. Joseph J. Kapoor, Wildlife Assistant, Thekkady 685536, Idukki Dist, Kerala, Rs.27/-; Mr. Manjit Singh Dhindsa, Dept. of Zoology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana 141004, Punjab, Rs.10/-; Mr. G.P. Sharma, Proff. of Zoology, Punjab University, Chandigarh, Rs. 10/-; Mr. GBR Walkey, Bethesda Leprosy Hospital, Narsapur, 534275, W. Godavari District, A.P., Rs.15/-; Flt. Lt.S. Rangaswami, "Gopala", 21-E, HIG Flats, Thiruvanniyur, Madras 600 041, Rs.15/-; Master A.R.D. Ramachandra Raja, Seethamma, Nawab Garden, Kotturpuram, Madras 600 081, Rs.10/-; Mr. V.S. Sexena, IFS, Dy. Conservator of Forests, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, Rs.15/-; Mrs. Rona Ghate, Shivangaon, Nagpur, Maharashtra 440 019, Rs.25/-;

Mr. D.E. Aranha, I, Sunbeams, St. Anthony's Road, Chembur, Bombay 71, Rs.15/-; Mr. J.L. Singh, 596, Saraspur Colony, No.1, Western Railway, Ahmedabad 380 002, Rs.25/-; Mr. M.N. Vasudevan, The Nedungadi Bank Ltd., Shornur 2, Kerala, Rs.25; Mr. Ashok Kumar, 4, National Tower, 13, London Street, Calcutta 700 017, Rs.100/-; M/s. Prints India, 11, Darya Ganj, New Delhi 110 002, Rs.15/-; Mr. E. Hanumantha Rao, c/o. Shama Rao and Sons, Post Box No.2766, Bangalore 27, Rs.25/-; Mrs. Jamal Ara, Harmu Housing Colony, No.M,7, Single, Ranchi 12, Bihar, Rs.20/-; Dr. K.V. Sreenivasan, Karthika, TC 1/2113, Kumarapuram, Travandrum 695011, Rs.15/-; Mr.M.V. Achar, Secretary, Wildlife Club-FRI and College, P.O. New Forest, Dehra Dun 248006, Rs.15/-; Mr. Kumar Surendra Singh, President, Wild Life Preservation Society of Bihar, P.O. Gidhaur Dist., Monghyr, Bihar 811305, Rs.15/-; Mr. Udayan Sengupta, 7B, "Balaka", 69/B, Promothesh Barua Sarani, Calcutta 700 019, Rs.15/-; Mr. Mosaddique Umar, High Court, Gauhati, Assam 781 001, Rs.15/-; Mr. V.R. Bhat, (Behind) 68, Kika Street, Bombay 400 004, Rs.15/-; Mr. Gurmeet Singh Kanwal, 24, Mahadev Road, New Delhi, Rs.10/-; Dr.H.R. Bhat, National Institute of Virology, Field Station, Sagar 577401, Shimoga District, Karnataka, Rs.15/-; Mr. Liyaqatullah Khan, KHAJI-KI-HAVELI, MOHALLA BAMBA, JODHPUR 342001, Rs.15/-; Miss Rekha Shukla, Texas Kumudawadi, Bhavnagar Para 364003, Rs.10/-; Mrs. Lakshme K. Nair, B-54, Eversweet Apts., Jai Prakash Road, Andheri (West), Bombay 58, Rs.15/-; Mr. J.T.M. Gibson, Shanti Niwas, Gulab Bari, Ajmer 305001, Rs.20/-; The Boys Library, St. Xaviers High School, Tilak Road, Bombay, Rs.10/-; Mr. Naresh Nanda, Asst. Divisional Engineer, Hindustan Steel Works, Construction Ltd., Malleswara, Dist. Chikmagalur, 577142, Rs.15/-; Miss. Sarita Nanda, 36/F-5, Girish Mukherjee Road, Bhawanipur, Calcutta 700 025, Rs.15/-; Mr. R.N. Chatterjee, Sitaram Kutir, A/4, Nakamadar, Ajmer 305001, Rs.15/-; Mr. D.B. Wijesinghe, 1, Charlotte Road, Wallington, Surrey, 8M6 9AX, England, 5 pounds; Mr. Narendra Phanse, Dy. Comdt., 23 B.S.F. Bn, c/o. 56 APO; Col.R. Manorangan, 262, 36th Cross, 8th Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore 11, Rs.15/-; Mr. S.K. Roy, D-323, Defence Colony, New Delhi 110 024, Rs.30/-;

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 4 APRIL, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XIX No. 4

April 1979

Contents

Some Birds of the Kathmandu Valley, Part II, by Jasper Newsome.

Rewarding Moments, by Aamir Ali.

Golden-backed Woodpecker in Kutch, by S.K. Reeves.

Birds at Madras Crocodile Bank, by Mr. & Mrs. Romulus Whitaker.

The Birds of Dodda Gubbi, Bangalore, From the Editors Portico
(Part I) by Lavkumar Khacher.

Correspondence

Comments on the March Newsletter by Lavkumar Khacher.

Comments, by T. Gay.

More news from Dodda Gubbi by ZF.

Occurrence of Blackbrowed Flycatcher Warbler at Meerut by Y.M. Rai.

Our Contributors

Subscriptions

Some Birds of the Kathmandu Valley, By Jasper Newsome (PART II)

One autumn day I was most fortunate in observing a pair of that interesting and uncommon Himalayan species, the Honey Guide, at about 8,000 ft. on Phulchowki. Three other species one will meet at median heights on Phulchowki are the tiny and skulking Chestnut headed Ground Warbler; the bright green tree haunting Orange Bellied Leaf Bird and the sky Blue Winged Minla, this last being found in the quarry area at the foot of Phulchowki.

Another good hill area near Kathmandu are Nagarjung, north of the Swayambhunath Stupa where one encounters Bonellis, Booted, Black and Steppe Eagles and also the Eagle Owl. North of Kathmandu, beyond the Buddhanilakantha temple, rises the 8,500 ft. hill of Sheopuri. I have spent more time on Sheopuri than any other high surround to Kathmandu, often for days at a time alone in the forest. Sadly this forest is being cutover and grazed so fast that radical protection measures will be necessary to save it. Shy species like the Nepal Cutia, the Redwinged Shrike Babbler and the Red tailed Minla are becoming rare. As on Phulchowki, Black capped Sibilas abound. Many, if not all the species of Phulchowki do occur on Sheopuri, although the Parrot bill and Barwing are less common on the latter hill. The Laughing thrushes abound, particularly the Blue Winged Laughing Thrush, a bird of the shady forest floor that hops as much as it flies. The White throated Laughing Thrush, in its large loose flocks with a distinctive squealing contact note, also common, as is the Red headed Laughing Thrush. The White throated, the Rufous chinned and the Grey-sided Laughing Thrushes may all be met with, likewise the Striated and Streaked Laughing Thrushes.

Phylloscopi warblers one also sees in plenty, especially in spring and autumn. Tickell's Leaf Warbler is common in these seasons but breeds at a much higher altitude, as do the Dusky, the Grey faced, the Dull Green and the Large-billed Leaf Warblers, though the latter, like the Plain Leaf Warbler is a winter bird of the Valley floor. The Orange barred, the Yellow rumped and the Crowned Leaf Warblers may all be found at various heights on Sheopuri in winter and the last two mentioned species appear to breed. Owing to intense discomfort from the damp and the leeches, I have not spent much time on either Sheopuri or Phulchowki in the summer months.

Similar to the Phylloscopi are the warblers of the genus Seicercus. This genus is represented in the hill forests around Kathmandu by the Yellow eyed, Chestnut Crowned and Grey headed Warblers, although only the last mentioned is a resident. Similar but rarely met with is the Black faced Warbler of the genus Abroscopus.

Amongst the smaller birds of the lower vegetation of the Valley rim one will find the Chestnut headed and White browed Tit Babblers, also the Nepal Babbler, all of the genus Alcippe.

Although there are many species in Nepal, I have only come across two kinds of Rosefinch around Kathmandu in winter, the one being the Common Rosefinch and the other the Vinaceous Rosefinch, four of which I once encountered on the summit of Sheopuri. The only pigeons commonly met with are the Speckled Wood Pigeon and the Wedge tailed Green Pigeon, though one can see the Bengal Green Pigeon in the Valley, likewise the Ashy Wood Pigeon.

Right on the summit of Sheopuri in winter one will find the Eurasian Wren (Troglodytes) amongst the boulders. During a particularly cold spell one January when I camped on Sheopuri five days, I saw two species of birds from much further north, forced down by the cold weather - the Brambling and Alpine Accentor, two species I know from Europe. Both were first records for the Valley, but a second Brambling was seen near Godaveri the same week. At about the same time I saw a Merlin falcon, the second record for the Valley of a bird which belongs more to the north and west. On Sheopuri one may often see the European Hobby, except in mid winter, while the Oriental Hobby is found locally in Kathmandu. One of the most conspicuous raptors of these hills is the Black Eagle, but the Mountain Hawk Eagle with its strongly barred and spotted plumage is also often met with. The Upland, the Long Legged and the Eurasian Buzzards (Buteo) may all be seen around Kathmandu, but only the latter is resident. The owls of the Valley rim include the Collared Pigmy and Barred Owlets. As well as the aforementioned Eagle Owl, the very similar Forest Eagle Owl also occurs here, and may even be met with in daylight, when the heavily contrasting markings on the breast separate it from the Eagle Owl. At night the calls distinguish the birds, the Forest Eagle Owl having a trisyllabic call, the other a long drawn out hoot. Cuckoos are well represented with the Eurasian and Indian Cuckoos competing to drive one crazy with their calls, though the Himalayan and Small cuckoos are more mellow. At Godaveri one may come across the Large Green billed Malkoha.

Another family characteristic of the Himalaya is the Pheasant family, though they are now sadly depleted by hunters. The Impeyan Pheasant, though I never met with it myself here, may still occur near Kathmandu. This is very sad since under its Nepali name, Danphe, it is the national bird. The only pheasant one is likely to see is the Kalij, pairs been often seen in the oak forests, where the Common Hill Partridge is also to be found.

Ringling through the forests is the call of the Great Himalayan Barbet and lower down on the Valley floor one may also see the Blue throated, the Golden throated and the Crimson breasted Barbets.

Three species of minivet, all very similar, may be met with, but the common one of the forests is the Long tailed Minivet, whilst on the Valley floor one finds the Scarlet Minivet, and locally amongst pines, the Short billed Minivet. In winter the beautiful wall Creeper with its crimson and grey plumage comes down from the snowline and the oak forests one may find one or two species of Tree Creeper, the common one seemingly being the Sikkim Tree Creeper. No less than six species of sunbird occur in Kathmandu and environs, the common one being the Purple Sunbird in the lower areas, while the Nepal Sunbird and Mrs. Gould's Sunbird are not uncommon. The Fire tailed Sunbird is also often met with the Scarlet breasted and Black breasted more rarely.

On the slopes of Sheopuri, especially to the east of Nagey Gomba, one is in ideal babbler country and one may easily find the Rusty cheeked and Rufous necked Scimitar Babblers. Hard to observe but not as rare as once believed is Nepal's endemic bird, the Spiny Babbler, about his search for which Dillion Ripley wrote a most entertaining book in the early nineteen fifties. Also to be found in the semblands around the Kathmandu Valley are the Black throated and Black chinned Babblers.

In the space available it would not be possible to mention all the birds of Kathmandu, but before I close I must mention the birds of the streams - forktails, redstarts and dippers. In the Botanical Gardens and elsewhere the Spotted Forktail is unavoidable, with its screeching call and black and white body in low flight or flitting among rocks in the rushing streams. Also found around Kathmandu is the Slaty beaked Forktail. The rarity of the family is the delightful Little Forktail, smaller and more upright with a shorter tail than the others, but also black and white. The Brown Dipper inhabits the same habitat of rushing waters and where the dipper is one will also find the White capped and the Plumbeous Redstarts. Not aquatic and met with in forest clearings and on field edges is Hodgson's Redstart.

Waders pass through Kathmandu in fair numbers. The Little Ringed Plover is usually to be seen on the Bagwati river and Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff and Reeve are all common migrants. The Spotted Redshank I have seen near Chobar Gorge in November. Little and Termmicks Stints may be seen in passage, likewise the Lapwing and the Spur-winged Plover. The Common and Green Sandpipers are also frequently seen in the migration season. No less than four species of snipe may be seen - the Pintail, Fantail and Solitary Snipes and that large Eurasian snipe, The Woodcock.

I should close by mentioning those birds familiar to people from the Indian plains, which so far I have specifically avoided. On many overhead wires and other vantage points sits the Black Drongo, sallying forth to snap insects in the air (the Bronze Winged and Small Ragnetailed Drongos are to be found in the surrounding woods). That other common plains bird, the White breasted Kingfisher is as noisy and conspicuous in the Nepal Valley as anywhere. There are Common and Striated Swallows, House and Crag Martins, Common and Alpine Swifts.... The Kathmandu Valley list is large, and there is nowhere there which can't be visited in a single day's trip from a city hotel. In the city there are the Pariah Kites and House Crows, Common Mynas and House Sparrows, while Jungle Crows Jungle Mynas and Tree Sparrows are to be found in the suburbs. The Redvented Bulbul and Robin Dayal the Zitting Cisticola and Collared Bushchat, Spotted Dove, Ring Dove the Red and Rufous Turtle Doves are all to be found. Vultures come up from the plains in summer - Cinerenous, Black, Griffon, Whitebacked and Egyptian. The Rufous backed Shrike is a common resident, seen atop vantage points from the suburbs out to the lower hill scrub, whilst the Grey backed and Brown Shrikes pass through in autumn.

Night Herons are breeding in the city itself-near Kaiser Mahal (where there is a sublime Garden of Dreams) - and can be heard flying to feed at dusk. The Little and the Cattle Egrets both occur, as does the Pond Heron. The Roseringed Parakeet and Slaty headed Parakeet may be seen, the latter in winter in such places as the Royal Game Reserve at Gokarna - the finest place for the birds on the Valley floor.

The Collared and Pied Bush-chats are resident, whilst the Dark Grey and White tailed Bushchats pass through, as do the Himalayan and Eurasian Ruby throats. Yellow, Yellow headed, Grey, Pied and Large Pied Wagtails are all to be seen at some season or other, the Grey Wagtail breeding as close to the city as Swayambhunath. The Thickbilled, Plain coloured and the Firebreasted Flowerpeckers can all be seen, the two former in summer and the later in winter. In winter one may see the Yellow bellied Flowerpecker too. The Baya Weaver is a summer visitor whose breeding cycle peaks when the paddy is ripe. Kathmandu has a large, varied and everchanging bird population and must rank amongst the capital cities of the world where great birdwatching is to be had only a few miles from town. I hope this short and by no means systematic note helps further interest in Nepali (and all!) birds and thereby further their protection.

Rewarding Moments I. By Aamir Ali

There are many frustrations in birdwatching. Outings when you walk for hours and see very little because the birds are deliberately avoiding you. Focussing your binoculars at something interesting only to find that the bird has flown or moved ever so slightly and is hidden by a branch or leaves. Seeing a bird go into a bush from which he couldn't possibly emerge without your seeing him and yet finding that he has in fact done just that and left you waiting foolishly with your binoculars at the ready and with nothing to see. Tantalising glimpses of a bird among thick trees or bushes leading you a merry dance before flying off contemptuously.

It is perhaps because of these frequent setbacks that the rewards of a good long view, of a first sighting, of a view of some interesting behaviour, are so rich. Some such moments stand out in memory.

There was the case of the Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*). I had admired the picture of this bird in the Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe and been attracted by the description of it given in the Guide du Naturaliste dans les Alpes. "The Dipper" said this book ".... is a mountain bird which has spread its habitat to the plains, as long as there is cold water with waterfalls and rapids. In the mountains, the couples of this species divide up the river and torrents among themselves. They are found up to 2000 metres". (My translation).

Oliver Ashford, my mentor, told me one day that he had seen a Dipper on the Versoix River, a few minutes drive outside Geneva. The following Sunday - this was in March 1973 - I set out for this river to try and see it for myself.

There is a good place to park your car where the road crosses the river, a bare 10 minutes from where we lived at the time. From there I walked along a shady fisherman's path along the river; both banks were thickly wooded. It is a very pleasant walk at all times of the year; besides fishermen, the river is a favourite place for canoeists, shooting the rapids. A few years ago, some beavers were reintroduced in this river and are reported to be doing well. Indeed, the path is called "Le Sentier des Castors" (The Beavers Path).

I spent the whole morning on that path, peering devotedly at the river, but nary a Dipper did I see.

Returning disappointed to the car some three hours later, I leant over the parapet of the bridge for a few minutes. From under the

bridge - from under my feet as it were - a bird shot out and perched on a stone in the river about 50 metres away. It sat looking at me, rich chocolate brown with a white bib that was clean and sparkling; it bobbed up and down every few minutes. It was difficult to overcome my surprise and realise that this was the very bird I had been looking for. When it felt that it had rewarded me sufficiently for my morning's work, it flew off down the river and vanished. I spent the rest of the day in the glow of a memorable triumph.

A few weeks later I came with my son, and we saw the Dipper again in the same place, and two others as well. I hadn't realised quite how attached they are to their particular stretch of river.

The Bird Observation Centre at Sempach, in central Switzerland, produces an annual brochure devoted to one species. Most appropriately, next year, this was devoted to the Dipper. Referring to the special characteristics of this bird, it said "The adaptation of the Dipper to its watery environment is best reflected in its methods of seeking its food According to the circumstances, it finds its food by diving, by swimming, by walking on the river bed or by wading".

But, seeing the Dipper on the Versoix River near the city, only about 400 metres above sea level, seemed cheating. It should be seen in torrents in the high mountains, not on the doorstep of Geneva.

We used to spend our summer holidays at Champex, a small mountain resort in the Valais, a good centre for climbing and for less ambitious excursions. Every time we walked along a mountain torrent - whether it was the Drance d'Entremont coming down from the Grand St. Bernard, or La Drance de Ferret coming down the Val Ferret, or the Torrent du Darbellay, or the Torrent de l'A coming through a Nature Reserve, or, on our doorstep, the Arpette - I looked for the Dipper and saw nothing.

The Arpette was our favourite and most frequent walk. Leaving Champex, you took a pleasant path through thick pine forest, first along a man-made canal, then up along a real stream. In about 30 minutes you came out suddenly to large open meadows, covered with Alpine flowers, through which the stream meandered. As you came on to the meadow, there was the inevitable cafe; after that for the length of the valley, some two kilometres long leading to the Col des Ecandies, there were three wooden chalets and that was all.

One day, as we were returning home and had left the open valley to enter the gloom of the thick pine forest, my son said, There's your Dipper. And sure enough there he was, moving restlessly among the stones and water. After that, practically every time we passed that way, we saw him, always in that same stretch of water.

It was an odd place, because being just below the cafe, the stream was muckier here than anywhere else - debris, the inevitable plastic bottles, and so on.

We did not return to Champex the following year, but came back two years later. Our very first outing was to look for our Dipper but we saw nothing. Over the next fortnight we looked half a dozen times, but there was no Dipper.

Perhaps he had died a natural death and no one had taken his place. More likely he was disgusted with the extension of the cafe, the completion of a motor road leading to it, and the beginnings of some fearsome construction in the middle of the meadow. Another lovely, tranquil Alpine meadow was succumbing to the insatiable demands of motorised tourism. The Dipper, being a sensible bird, had decided it was time to go.

A couple of weeks later I went to the bridge over the Versoix to see if that Dipper was still there. Alas, he too seemed to have disappeared. But I did see one briefly, flying 'bullet like above water courses' as one description has it, much farther upstream.

Having seen the Dipper in its natural habitat, I was interested in trying to read something about it. It is found in the mountains of Europe, North Africa (Atlas) Asia Minor and Central Asia. In North America, there is a different species which is slate-coloured and without the white bib, *Cinclus Mexicanus*. It is found in the Rockies from the Aleutians and Alaska down to Southern California; it is not found in the east. Its oil or preen gland is much larger than its terrestrial relatives, enabling it to live in its watery environment. In Europe it is found up to almost 7000 ft, in Central Asia up to 17,000.

What about India? The Handbook, Vol.9, pages 138-145, gives five different species or races of Dipper: Whitebellied, Whitebreasted, Eastern Whitebreasted, West Himalayan Brown and East Himalayan Brown. The Whitebreasted Dipper (*Cinclus Cashmeriensis*) is, I presume, the local race of the Dipper that I saw. As so often with the Handbook, the description is the most apt and accurate of any; it has an immediacy born of direct observation, and evokes the bird exactly as you saw it. "Feeds mostly by plunging from a rock amid a stream into the icy water, swimming against the swift current with the help of its wings and walking on the bottom, remaining submerged for a half-minute or more. On emerging floats like a bobbing cork on the surface, sometimes whirled round like a coracle by the rushing current. Jumps on to a stone, shakes off the water from its plumage and resumes its nervous bowing and courtseying....Flight direct and swift with rapid quivering wingbeats low over the water, following bends of streams or coasting between the larger boulders."

Golden-backed Woodpecker in Kutch by S.K. Reeves.

May I be permitted to make a few comments on the sighting of a Golden-backed Woodpecker in Kutch by Mr.M.B. Khatri and others (December, 1978 Issue) and also on Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma's comments (February, 1979 Issue) on it.

First let me correct a small slip made by Mr. Sharma. He says that Mr. Khatri saw the bird in his garden (which would be in Bhuj), but Mr. Khatri records that he saw it in the Vijaya Vilas garden in Mandvi. I think it is important to correct this point in view of what I wish to say later as to the possible entry route of the bird to Kutch.

Mr. Sharma says that this sighting of the Golden-backed Woodpecker "is not of any extraordinary interest". It must be borne in mind that Mr.Khatri, Mr. Himatsinhji and members of the Pelican Nature Club live in Kutch, and, presumably, know the birds of their area well. Furthermore, when Dr. Salim Ali carried out his ornithological survey of Kutch in 1943 and 1944, preparatory to writing 'The Birds of Kutch', he failed to come across this bird.

Strangely enough, Hume writing in 1875 (Stray Feathers, Vol.3,P459) declares the bird to be "Common throughout the whole region" . ("Sindh, Cutch, Kattiawar, and Jodhpoor, to its extreme limits at the Sambhur-Lake").

It is pertinent to add that, in respect of Kutch, Hume had at his disposal the pick of Dr. Stoliczka's collection; a collection made by his own collectors; and, lastly, Dr. Stoliczka's paper J.A.S.B. 1872.

Mr. Khatri suggests two routes by which the bird entered Kutch. May I suggest a third. In 'Birds of Saurashtra' (P.276) Dharmakumarsinhji says that the Golden-backed Woodpecker is fairly well distributed throughout the Gir Forest and the Girnar. If a bird wandered from this area in a North-westerly direction it would arrive on the Kutch coast in the region of Mandvi, and what better haven could it find than the gardens of the Vijaya Vilas Palace, which, from all accounts, is an excellent spot for watching birds?

May I suggest a piece of useful, purposeful birdwatching which Mr. Khatri and the Pelican Nature Club might care to undertake: make a thorough, systematic investigation of the status of the Golden-backed Woodpecker in Kutch; it may well have changed over the years; after all, Dr. Salim Ali was writing about thirty-five years ago and Hume a hundred.

Birds at Madras Crocodile Bank by Mr. & Mrs. Romulus Whitaker

When we first bought 5 acres of coastal casuarina planted land near Mahabalipuram the only birds we could be sure of seeing were the occasional drongos or bee-eaters. Other birds just passed over disdainfully. With the establishment of the Crocodile Bank we planted hundreds of trees, dug ponds and provided thick vegetation for the crocodiles. As a result, the enclosed list of birds have been seen here. Several species such as sunbirds, pied wagtails, white breasted kingfishers, common kingfishers, crows, spotted dove have been nesting residents.

In the area outside the present 8 acre crocodile bank, birds are shy because of tribals with muzzle loaders and the usual contingent of village boys with catapults. Inside the crocodile bank birds have become remarkably tame, especially the second generation.

Every evening at about 5.30 p.m. a group (usually 2, sometimes 3 or 4) of Brahminy Kites visit the gharial breeding pond to pick up fish thrown to the gharial. The Brahminy is the true garuda, and not the white scavenger vulture which attracts so much undeserved piety at Thirukullikundaram.

Birds seen at the Crocodile Bank: 1. Common Crow 2. Jungle Crow 3. Common Kite 4. Brahminy Kite 5. Tawny Eagle 6. White-bellied Sea-eagle 7. Osprey 8. Spotted Owlet 9. Owl 10. Whitebreasted Kingfisher 11. Common Kingfisher 12. Pied Kingfisher 13. Paddy Bird 14. White-breasted Waterhen 15. Common Myna 16. Common Drongo 17. Small bee-eater 18. Large bee-eater 19. Tailor bird 20. White-capped babbler 21. Purple sunbird 22. Red crested cuckoo 23. Koel 24. Cuckoo shrike 25. Goldenback woodpecker 26. Stone plover 27. Yellow-wattled lapwing 28. Ring plover 29. Arctic tern 30. Caspian tern 31. Blackheaded gull 32. Rose-ringed parakeet 33. Spotted dove 34. Small, thin, shrike-like bird, grey, with single note high pitched whistle (looks like magpie robin) 35. Paradise flycatcher 36. Flamingo 37. Chestnut winged cuckoo 38. Brown noddy 39. Bridled tern 40. Ashy swallow shrike 41. Tree pie 42. Gull 43. Gull-billed tern 44. Whistling teal 45. Shikra 46. Kestrel 47. Pharoah's chicken.

The Birds of Dodda Gubbi, Bangalore, From the Editors Portico (Part I)
by Lavkumar Khacher

Starting anything is difficult. It is an universal truth to such an extent that one might state it as being an empirical fact of the universe. Let me elucidate - mathematically 1 divided by 0 results in infinity or putting it more simply, the distance between 0 and 1 is infinite while the distance between 1 and 2 is one unit and 1 and a million is a million units which are insignificant compared to infinity. In physics we have, if I remember rightly the law of inertia regarding which my readers, having long forgotten their school physics, might turn to their teenage juveniles for an

explanation. It takes a good deal more heating to get water or any liquid to reach boiling yet not much time is required to get the entire quantity evaporated. And, ofcourse, the business of getting the day started is quite an effort - bed tea and all that, provides an explanation for birdwatching not catching on though being up and about with the first bird catching the dallying worm is a physical pleasure greater than sitting it out in a cinema hall, it would be interesting to see how popular cinemas would be if they had early morning shows instead of night shows, and if birdwatching could be done in the failing light of day - perhaps the song of the shama would be more popular than that of a Lata or a Rafiq! A scientific friend of mine would comment "I guess you're right!" Well, to come to the point, a thing unfortunately, most of us never seem to be able to get to, all I want to say is that it is difficult writing something when you are asked to do so, specially so when the request comes from one's very hospitable host.

Perhaps, the best point to make a start from is right from the point where one is and at the moment, 14th March 1979, I'm sitting in the portico of the Editor's delightful retreat north of Bangalore. It is morning and from where I recline the eye looks east across a wide sloping lawn towards the Dodda Gubbi lake and on further to an undulating horizon crannellated by stands of casuarinas. The whole landscape is drenched in bright sunlight - not unusual in India, the sun is hot but the air cool with soft breezes stirring carrying from afar the contented hum of insects, the trill of Green Bee-eaters, and the plaintive cry of Yellow-wattled Lapwings from a near by piece of ploughed land. A group of Common Mynahs are squabbling along with a small party of Brahminy Mynahs in the next garden. I can hear the churring and ticking calls of several Blyth's Reed Warblers from the small, dense crowned mangoes dotting the lawn, and the unkept tangled vegetation growth on the periphery of the garden. Koels are calling among shady, dark foliaged Jack Fruit Trees and the challenging cry of the Shikra comes from the same direction. A Green Barbet is sounding his repetition call from further afield and from every side come the dreamy crooning of Spotted Doves and cooing of Little Brown Doves. The Common Iora's pleasant whistles interspersed with angry churrs emanate from a shrubbery across the lawn.

The most conspicuous birds of this garden undoubtedly are the pair of Golden Orioles as they flash the bright golden yellow of the male and yellow-green of the female flying from one mango to another. Not only is the male beautiful to look at, he is melodious to listen to. His pleasing, liquid calls are uttered without inhibitions throughout the sunny day. I would agree with my host that the main business of the Oriole seems to be to add beauty to the world both in colour and sound.

Another eyecatcher flashing across my languid gaze is the Hoopoe. A richer coloured bird this, compared to the paler ones we get during winter in Saurashtra. At the moment this individual Hoopoe and its mate are busy collecting grubs and shuttling to and fro suggesting a hungry family tucked away somewhere in the next farm. If the hoopoes are already burdened with domestic chores, a White-throated Munia seems determined not to be left behind judging from the way it is busily trailing grass in hasty flights from the ground up into one of the small leafy mangoes.

With all the rich coloured flowers around I expect to see sunbirds and sure enough a male Purplerumped Sunbird has flown into honeysuckle draped with rich orange flowers and his mate has just flown past in direct flight suggesting a nest some where at the end of the trajectory.

To my right there is a lily pond stocked, as I was told, with fish. Yesterday I had strained to catch sight of the tiny fish but in vain. Today through the corner of my eye I see flashes of bright blue and red as a Whitebreasted Kingfisher repeatedly darts to the water from a nearby stone bench. I certainly can see the reason for his merry cackling laugh, the gay vagabond is enjoying his little joke on my good host. While the Kingfisher goes about his poaching openly and in flashes of beauty and bursts of merry laughter, the Pond Heron is, like a true poacher, circumspect and tries, unsuccessfully in this case however, to get his fish without drawing attention to himself. I say unsuccessfully because his drab colours so efficient in obliterating him in his normal mud and reedy habitat fail him against a smooth green sward and he sticks out like a sore thumb.

From my languid position in the wicker chair I raise my field-glasses to see a small round, black object suspended over a clump of grass at the far end of the lawn. It turns out to be a dumpy male Pied Bushchat, perched atop a grass stalk. His little brown wife flies up and joins him and their combined weights bend the stalk. There is a lot of flicking of small wings and tails and they both fly away out of my view. Moving the field glasses to the left I notice a Brown Shrike prominently perched on a fence stake. Vigilently upright he scans the ground around him. He suddenly becomes alert and flies down on some prey I cannot see but is forestalled by a Black Drongo dashing in to deprive him of his breakfast. Seeing the drongo I realise I've not made any mention of the Grey Drongos I hear chattering away in the large Jack Fruit Trees where the Koels are having a merry time. A pair of merry Redvented Bulbuls come flying towards the house and alight in a Singapore Cherry bush close by. They are fond of the berries a partiality shared, I'm told, with the Koels.

Extending my vision into the clear sky I see a couple of Pariah Kites effortlessly soaring around. A lovely Pale Harrier goes gliding past and a Brahminy Kite wheels round and makes for the lake. A number of Redrumped and Common Swallows flit around hawking invisible (to me) flying insects. Five Roseringed Parakeets arrive and make a direct approach to the guava trees at the corner of the garden.

And finally, to round off the tally, I must take note of the Grey Partridges incessantly calling from a grassy field across the road and not forget to mention the Jungle and House Crows, thankfully mainly heard from next doors and not seen in this well ordered garden.

Comments on the March Newsletter by Lavkumar KhacherRare Occurrence of a Coot breeding at Khandala by A. Navarro S.J. Page 8:

In October 1976-29th October to be precise on a small jheel near Nasik off the road to Trimbuk - Jamshed Panday and myself found Coots with young, some very small, and others as large as their parents but lighter on the lower parts. The note has appeared in the journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. Incidentally, there were a number of Little Grebes nesting along with the Coots.

What can this be? by Dr. Dutta page 9:

Quite obviously Lesser Whistling Teal *Dendrocygna javanica*. The overgrown tank as described by Dr. Dutta would be to the liking of this resident species. The "drooping appearance" in slow flight and the "continuous peee-peee-peee call" also points to this species. White eyed Pochards (*Nyroca nyroca*) is one of the "diving ducks" and prefers more open and deeper water where it feeds by diving for aquatic vegetation.

Comments. by T. Gay

Re. Bro. Navarro's Note on Little Grebe chicks at the beginning of December, I can add two more "out of season" records, both very recent.

(1) On 6 March, in a Western Suburb of Poona, I found a Dabchick's nest on which a parent was sitting. When the sitting bird "handed over charge" to the other parent, I saw two eggs, pure white and unstained. (2) On 17th March, in the Bird Sanctuary near Poona's eastern boundary, I saw a pair of Dabchicks collecting materials for a nest, and placing these in a very small clump of Water Hyacinth in the middle of an open stretch of river.

One feature common to both nesting sites is that they are in places where human beings are passing fairly close, all through the day.

Whistler gives this bird's nesting season as "May to September", which Salim Ali extends to "April to October". It looks as though we must extend the season still further to "March to December". Or should we simply say, "all twelve months", and leave it to some enterprising Little Grebe to fill in the two blank months?

Re. Dr. Dutta's "What can this be?" Surely these sucks were Lesser Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*)?

More news from Dodda Gubbi by ZF

Lavkumar Khacher has reported on what he saw from the portico of our house and I would like to remind him to send in part II which I suppose will contain an account of the birds we saw around Dodda Gubbi Lake, including the migration of Spotted Sandpipers.

Last evening (28th March 79) I had the pleasure of seeing a large congregation of Garganey Teal (*Anas querquedula*) on the lake. They had obviously arrived yesterday because there were no signs of them previously. There were over 50 birds in beautiful plumage crowding into a small grassy patch in shallow water. The males are most attractive with their prominent white eye stripes. There were also over a dozen Little Ringed Plovers, a fair

number of Green Shanks, one Spotted Sandpiper, and one Common Sandpiper. On the previous day (27th March) Peter Jackson was here and he pointed out a few Red Shanks. At this time of the year their legs are very far from being red, and identification becomes difficult. In the case of the Green Shanks, the upturned bill the white rump and the distinctive call - tew-tew-tew - makes for easy identification.

Occurrence of Blackbrowed Flycatcher Warbler at Meerut, by Y.M. Rai

On 25th March 79 on my usual birdwatching visit to Hastinapur forests, some 35 km. north-east of Meerut, the birds that attracted attention were the black browed flycatcher warblers (*Seicercus burkii*). They flitted among the shrubs of flowering *Adhatoda Vesica* under the trees on the slope of a hillock in the forested ravines. There was no mistake about the two dark stripes on the crown with yellow in the middle, bright yellow underparts and very clear, bright yellow eye ring. One bird dashed for an insect but was outsmarted by an Olivaceous leaf warbler. Binocs 10 x 50. Distance about 20 yards. Time of day 1 p.m. Weather, clear and sunny.

It may be that due to severe snowfall particularly in western Himalayas in the first week of March and consequent rain and very cold weather here till mid March, the birds might have drifted to these lower altitudes.

Our Contributors: Their addresses

Mr. Jasper Newsome, The Post Master, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Mr. Aamir Ali, Nanda Devi, 14, Chemin des Graviers, Port Choisseul, 1290, Versoix, Geneva, Switzerland. Mr. S.K. Reeves, 6 Town Close, Holt, Norfolk, England. Mr. & Mrs. Romulus Whitaker, Madras Snake Park, Guindy Deer Park, Madras 600 022. Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, 14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360 004. Mr. Thomas Gay, Dev Kunj, Prabhat Road, Poona 411004. Mr. Y.M. Rai Grami, 414, W. Kutchery Road, Meerut 250 001.

Subscriptions for 1979 have been received from:

Karnataka: The Wildlife Action Group, 20-E, M.G. Road, Bangalore 1, Rs.15/-.
Maharashtra: Mrs. L. Nilakanta, 7, Adiabab Estate, Juhu, Bombay 49, Rs.30/- (two copies); Mr. H.P. Harchekar, 60, Dwarka Niketan, Gokhale Road (North), Dadar, Bombay 28, Rs.15/-; Mr. B.S. Jagadish, Staff Hostel, IIT, Powai, Bombay 400 076, Rs.15/-; Mr. Prakash Gole, Hon.Rept.WWF-India, 184, Shaniwar Peth, Pune 411030, Rs.51/-; Mr. Tushar Tijoriwala, A.I. Apartments, 5th Floor, 270, Walkeshwar Road, Bombay 6, Rs.15/-; Mr. T.V. Jose, Flat No.34/671, MHB, New Siddharth Nagar, Goregaon(West), Bombay 62, Rs.15/-; Mr. N. Kandhari, 104, Tungarli, Fritchley Hill, Lonavla, Rs.15/-; Mr. R.E. Hawkins, 56, Valentina, 5, Gamadia Road, Bombay 400 026, Rs.20/-; Mr. A.M. Tyabji, 5-C, Somerset Place, 61-D, Bhulabhai Desai Road, Bombay 26, Rs.45 (for three years);
Tamil Nadu: Mr. R.V. Mohan Rao, 63, Chamiers Road, A.A. Puram, Madras 26, Rs.15/-; Mr. V.S. Velayudan, B.42, 2nd Main Road, Tiruchirapalli, Rs.15/-;
Assam: Dr. S.A.S. Biswas, Systematic Forest Botany Branch, Forest Services College cum Research Centre, 793101, Rs.10/-; Madhya Pradesh: Mr. Narayan Singh, 3/1, Palasia, Indore, 452001, Rs.15/-; Uttar Pradesh: Mr. A.P. Gupte, Friends Rural Center, Rasulia, Hoshangabad 461001, Rs.5/-; Prof. Dinesh Mohan, Director, CBRI, Roorkee, Rs.15/-; Sri. Mohan Lal Shah, c/o. M/s. Nath Shah & Sons, 11, Bara Bazar, Naini Tal 263001, Rs.15/-; Sri. Chandra Sekhar Chandola, Sher-ka-danda, Naini Tal 263001, Rs.15/-; Sri. Dhiredrat Tewari, St. Michele's Cottage, Ayarpatta, Naini Tal 263001, Rs.15/-; Sri. Bipin Chandra Pande, Oak Cottage, Naini Tal 263001, Rs.10/-; Kerala: Mr. K.K. Surendran, K.T. Krishnan and Sons, Manhat Road, Mulanthuruty, 682314, Rs.115; Prof. John C. Jacob, Zoological Club, Payyanur 670307, Rs.15/-; Andhra Pradesh: Mr. Nazir Latif, Latifia, B-2-675, Road 13, Banjara Hills.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 5 MAY, 1979



NEWSLETTER F O R
B I R D W A T C H E R S

Vol. XIX No. 5

May 1979

Contents

Random Thoughts and Comments of bird-enthusiast from Kutch, by M.H. Himmatsinhji.

Orange Honeyguide and Bullfinch, Two unusual birds near the Valley of Flowers, by S.R. Shah.

Birds go to Roost by Prakash Gole.

Helping the birds in distress by S.S. Saini.

Comments on April 1979 Newsletter by Lavkumar Khacher.

Sparrow Control in China by Dr. Ishwar Prakash.

Our Ground-Birds by Corvus Splendens Teegayensis (Courtesy, Times of India, Bombay)

Correspondence

Garudas and Vultures by M.S. Ramamoorthi.

House Sparrows nesting in Pant Pockets by K.K. Mandalaywala.

Somebody please identify, by Baldev Mitra.

Our Contributors

Subscriptions

Random Thoughts and Comments of bird-enthusiast from Kutch, by M.H. Himmatsinhji

It is after a long time that I have sat down to type this note for the Newsletter. Somehow I lost touch with it for several years, but I am happy to note that over the years the number of contributors have increased and therefore more people are taking interest in birds and their environment. Ours is a vast country, with a variety of bird species living in various types of conditions. It is only through a medium like the Newsletter that information and knowledge about our birds and their habitat could be disseminated.

I happen to live in Kutch which, geographically situated as it is, is ornithologically extremely interesting. Many readers of the Newsletter have perhaps not come across the book on the birds of this area, "The Birds of Kutch", by Dr. Salim Ali. It is of course now out of print. The author, in his introduction to the book, says: 'Lying on the western fringe of the zoo-geographical region known as the Indian or oriental, there is nothing distinct or peculiar in the resident bird-life of Kutch to separate it in any marked degree from that of the more or less adjacent dry areas of Sind, Northern Gujarat, Western Rajputana or the northern portions of the Kathiawar Peninsula. But stretching along the boundary between two of the five sub-divisions into which Blanford has split this region - namely between the Indo-Gangetic Plain and Peninsular India - it is more or less the transition zone for a number of sub-species. These intergrade so imperceptibly into one another hereabout that it is often quite impossible to place individual specimens, or even small series, with certainty. The Great Rann, however, seems to function as an efficient barrier to local migration."

This area offers unlimited scope to both the expert and the layman for studying the migrants which come in winter and those birds which pass through Kutch in autumn. The latter, the passage migrants, which spend the winter in some parts of the African Continent seem to somehow miss Kutch on their return in spring. Among these birds are: the Kashmir Roller, Indian Whitethroat, Grey-backed Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher etc. Most of the regular winter visitors come from northern and north-western Europe. Some birds come from West Asia and the Persian Gulf also. It is very interesting to see the migrants as they first arrive and just before they leave our shores, for many of them are in their breeding plumage then; and identification of such birds becomes easy. This cold weather I saw a large number (over 40) of White Storks in the Banni (a grass covered stretch of land between the mainland of Kutch and Great Rann of Kutch) where low lying areas get inundated with water to form shallow lagoons, called 'dhundhs' in Kutchhi, and incoming waders collect there in large numbers. They start arriving in July-August and their numbers swell to the maximum by the month of October. Then as the water starts drying up, the birds move on to the sea coast and perhaps further inland in peninsular India.

There could hardly be any bird-enthusiast who has not heard or read about the Great Rann of Kutch, for it is there that the famous 'Flamingo City' is situated. Unlike other deserts of the world, including our Rajasthan Desert, the Rann is not a sandy waste as many people are prone to think but it is a muddy area which gets inundated with shallow water during the monsoon season. Besides the tidal water which enters into the Rann, rivers like the Luni and Banas along with small rivulets and streams, both from Kutch and Gujarat and across from Pakistan, empty into it. Then it normally dries up during the cold weather and becomes as hard as asphalt with the heat of the sun and the dry atmosphere. There is no sweet water to be found either in the Great or the Little Rann of Kutch, so there are no oases in them. That is why when we saw a goldenbacked woodpecker at Mandvi, as already reported by Shri. Khatri, we had no logical explanation as to how it turned up in Kutch. We have had some unexpected and rare visitors like the Bewicks Swan, Hair-crested Drongo and Woodcock here, but they are migratory and are known to travel over long distances through sustained flight.

Mentioning the Rann and the 'Flamingo City', I am reminded of the fact that it is just not the flamingo that breed there. The first time Dr. Salim Ali visited the place to observe the breeding flamingo of which the total number estimated there at that time was about half a million, he also found the avocets breeding in the Great Rann; a first record of this bird breeding within Indian limits. Then on a subsequent visit there he found Rosy Pelicans breeding, also for the first time in this country. To crown these discoveries, it once again went to the credit of Dr. Salim Ali to discover the Lesser Flamingo breeding along with the common ones! Incidentally, the local birdwatchers and the people of Bhuj were quite excited to see a party of about 150 Rosy Pelicans descend on the local lake just outside the town to feed on the concentration of fish left in the receding water in the lake. To the best of my knowledge, Hamirsar Lake was visited by these curious-looking birds for the first time.

It was quite interesting to read the remarks of Shri. Indra Kumar Sharma (Newsletter of February, 1979) about birds like woodpeckers etc. being seen in oases in the Indian Desert. I am sure readers of the Newsletter would be interested to know in which oases woodpeckers and other birds, mentioned by Shri. Sharma, are found and the distance of the particular oases, from the usual haunts of the birds mentioned. Such definite information always helps to add to the knowledge of the movements of birds in different areas of the country. Local migrations of birds in India have been under constant study and certain facts keep on coming to light as a result of the observations carried out by various persons throughout the country. As far as this area is concerned, two examples of what I have stated come to mind: one is that of the Jungle Crow, seen near Mandvi. This crow occurs in Saurashtra, just across the

Gulf of Kutch, but has not been normally found in Kutch. However I have seen a couple of birds at Mandvi. This is obviously a case of assisted migration; for the birds concerned must have come across perched on a ship or a country craft. The other example is that of a Little Brown Dove: this dove was ringed on 15.3.61 in the vicinity of Bhuj, and was found near Hyderabad, Sindh in Pakistan on 27-2-1964. It was believed that the Great Rann of Kutch forms an effective enough barrier to local migration of resident birds, however the example of the dove proves that at least some stray birds could cross the barrier.

I would like to mention here that ornithology is a branch of science and like in all other scientific theories in ornithology also there is no room for guesswork and statement of facts without definite proof. Whether one studies general behaviour, food habits or any other aspect of bird-life, the most important aspect to remember is that one has to be methodical, exact and above all one must avoid the pitfall of any preconceived notions to influence ones findings in the field study undertaken. There is a common tendency among some amateur birdwatchers to add as many new birds to their list as they possibly can. While doing this, at times, their keenness to identify new birds quickly overpowers their caution for the correct identification of the bird, or birds, concerned. A good example of what I am trying to convey was the identification of a female Kashmir Redstart as a redtailed chat by some of the birdwatchers here in Bhuj. As Lavkumar Khacher rightly pointed out, the bird concerned was really a female of the former species; and Shantibhai Varu stands corrected.

And lastly, I was greatly pleased to see in the Newsletter of February, 1979 the comments of my very knowledgeable and learned friend (I could almost call him my Guru) Lavkumar Khacher on the Newsletter of 1978. Since I am dealing in this note with the bird-life of Kutch, I would like to state for the information of Shri. Khacher and other contributors to the Newsletter that the 'gray duck' mentioned by Shantilal Varu was none other than the Spotbill - *Anas poecilorhyncha* - or the Grey Duck, as it is called by Stuart Baker in the Fauna series and by Dr. Salim Ali, in the Book of Indian Birds. Among the resident ducks to be found in Kutch, the Nukta, Spotbill and the Lesser Whistling Teal are always present and breed in good years (when rain is plentiful). The Cotton Teal is only an occasional visitor and so far is not recorded breeding in Kutch. In recent years the number of breeding Spotbills has increased, and they are to be seen in all types of locations during the rainy season. A couple of Whistling Teal come every season to my own compound and after inspecting various likely breeding sites settle for one particular Neem Tree; but I am sure the eggs are pilfered by the house crow who is well-represented in my garden.

As for the 'Australian Babul' of Shantibhai, it is as a matter of fact *Prosopis juliflora* to which he was referring. Besides the Gujarati name of 'pardesi bawal', in Kutch this tree is variously known as

'Morbi bawal', 'gando bawal' (literally translated - mad babul) and the latest name I have come across for it is "hadkyo bawal" (rabid babul)!

Orange Honeyguide and Bullfinch, Two unusual birds near the Valley of Flowers, by S.R. Shah

On the way to the Valley of Flowers, half a mile before reaching Ghangharia (10,000') a perpendicular rockwall forms an opening in the Laxmanganga gorge thickly forested with evergreens and pines. The foot track climbs steeply up the left bank of the cascading torrent. About a hundred feet above the track, in the crevices and niches of the rockwall, four half moonshaped honey combs (5' diametre) swarming with bees attract the attention of the visitor to the Valley of Flowers or to the Sikh Shrine of Hemkund. But more striking are the three pure snowwhite deserted combs with not a single bee there on. A solitary bamboo pole sticking out from a crevice nearby is the only remnant of a futile attempt to climb up the wall, years back, by the local people to get the honey-combs.

On 15-7-1976 we happened to tarry a couple of minutes at the freak phenomnan the three snowwhite combs, and were soon rewarded. Two birds flew in from nowhere, had a bite at the snowwhite comb and perched on the pole, hunched up like a heron. Five more flew in, had a bite at the comb but perched among the crevices without trying to perch on the bamboo. We felt as if the perch on the bamboo was reserved for the two guys. Now and then one would sally forth for a bite of the wax but never sallied up to catch one of the bees flying around the honey comb full of honey. After the sally one would return to his own perch like a bee-eater. The two on the bamboo never changed their perches even by a couple of inches, where as the five returned sometimes to different crevices. We again saw "The Seven" on 23rd July on our way back. We could not find the bird in the Handbook, nor from our friends; as our notes described it slightly incorrectly as "light olive brown grey with yellow forehead and rump".

On 26-7-78 I received a note at Govindghat from Shri. S.A. Hussain of the Bombay Natural History Society who was in the Valley of Flowers asking me to show the rare orange rumped honeyguides to participants of the Nature Camp organised by BHNS.

The mystery of these snowwhite combs was solved a day later.

A species of wasp approach the honeycomb in a swarm. The bees fly away in panic. The wasps eat all the eggs leaving the comb snowwhite. It is then that the honey guides come to eat the wax. The two birds on the pole were males and the **five** perching crevices were females who dare not perch on the special spot reserved for their lords. This time on 26-7-78 and 12-8-78 we saw one male with three paramours. They flew away in a couple of minutes but returned after ten minutes. I would now describe the birds as olive brown. Orange yellow forehead and rump. In 1976 they were seven. In 1978 they were four.

On 2-8-1978 I was loitering near the forest rest house at Ghangharia. At about 9 a.m. an orange bird came flying and perched on the ground hardly five feet away from my feet. It was eating either seeds or worms. A tiny boulder flanking the ground partly obstructed my view. I had no binoculars at that moment. I quietly tiptoed behind the boulder. I had the rare opportunity of observing a rare bird from a rare "near distance" of four to five feet for full fifteen minutes. It was as if an orange yellow finch had dipped its mouth in a black liquid. The tail was very slightly forked. The underparts between the legs and end of body were white. The rump was also white. The flanks (of the wings) reminded me of the flanks of a sibia or a tree pie or a shrike. It collected a worm in the beak and flew away. It returned when I was about to leave the boulder thinking that it would not return. I thought the nest must be very near but it was impossible to enter the dense wood patch. Again it flew away without a worm in its bill, but flying from one branch to another so that no one would guess that its nest was nearby. For this orange bull finch the Handbook gives Simla as the eastern limit, but this spot is more than 100 miles east of Simla.

Birds go to Roost by, Prakash Gole

In Poona are certain groups of large trees, the Banyan, the Peepal, the Rain and the Babul, that are favourite roosting places for hundreds of birds. At one such roost I have counted about 3500 Common Mynahs coming in to roost within a span of 25 minutes, i.e. almost 150 mynahs per minute. House and Jungle Crows also roost at the same place. In March, on way to their breeding grounds further north, Rosy Pastors spend about a week in Poona and roost at the same place with mynahs. In another roost near the river bank, Pond Herons, Cattle and Little Egrets associate with common mynahs and crows. Let me describe a typical evening at one of these roosts.

On an evening in March I sat by the riverside on a high pedestal rock to watch the birds coming in to roost. It is five minutes past six and I am not too early. Birds have already started assembling on the river bank. Common mynahs in groups of two and four are flying in from the north, so are small groups of crows. They alight on the turf and rocks and search for insects and other food. Later they will cross the river and go over to the roosting trees on the opposite bank.

On the opposite bank, in shallow waters, stands a group of cattle and little egrets, about 25 of them. To my east and west are groups of Blackwinged Stilts still feeding, some delicately lifting one leg out of water and putting it in very deliberately. In the river swims a group of 30 Dabchicks, describing semi-circles on water, chasing each other and spluttering on water with their short legs and wings. There are other waders too, Common and Green Sandpipers, Little Stints, and a pair of Redwattled Lapwing standing on a rock; while almost at every 2 metres lurks the hunched form of a pond heron, motionless and eager to catch anything moving in water. Yellow, Yellowheaded and White Wagtails run on the turf singly, wagging their tails and uttering tseep, tseep in their short flights.

It is now ten minutes past six. Women washing clothes start putting them in buckets ready to return home. People taking a bath come out of water to dress. Causeway across the river is now full of people walking and cycling home from work. Birds appear to take no notice of this daily bustle of human beings.

It is now 6.15 p.m. The sun is very low in the western horizon. A gentle breeze blows from the west and the first group of birds flying to their roost, comes into view. It is a party of four Little Cormorants flying in no definite formation, going from west to east. Presently they disappear towards the east. This group is followed by four more cormorants flying singly. The last one appears to miss his line of flight, circles twice over the river, orientates himself correctly and disappears to the east.

From the west now come flocks of Roseringed Parakeets, flying low and fast in groups of 15 to 30 individuals. Shrieking as they fly, they quickly disappear over the eastern horizon.

Now it is 6.25; the sun has set. The trickle of common mynahs arriving on the river banks, has grown into a steady flow. They wheel over water to settle in grass and on rocks, conversing softly with one another. On the bare slope opposite me have gathered more than 250 common mynahs, not very talkative, as if waiting patiently for some signal. Sometimes a flock of 30-40 mynahs takes to air, sways and turns and banks to settle once again and mingle with their brethren, chattering as they touch ground.

Crows are most boisterous. Some of them have already gone to the roosting trees. But they have not settled down. They fly from tree to tree in loose groups calling as they fly. Sometimes a gang of about 25 rises with a loud croak, flies back to water only to turn back again towards the trees. Some cross over to my side, make a detour and go back, whispering softly to themselves. A group amuses itself by chasing a Pariah Kite that has deftly picked up a watersnake that is dangling in its talons. The chase goes on for a long time. Now other Pariah Kites have appeared from the north and the west and are circling leisurely over the roosting trees.

Blackwinged Stilts are now gathering in one spot. About 50 of them have lined the water's edge. Others scattered over the river now fly in groups of 10-12, low over water, their pink legs trailing behind and join the bigger assembly. Soon more than 100 stilts can easily be counted by the water's edge. They stand in shallow water, some preening, some tucking their heads under wings. They will spend the night at this same spot. The group of Little Grebes is still mid-stream. Only one or two of them have come nearer the bank.

Now it is 6.35. A few pond herons have reached the roosting tree. They roost in a group of babul trees that fringe the river-bank. They rise singly, each one to himself and slowly wing their way to the trees, immediately to become invisible on folding their wings. I go on counting as one by one they reach the trees. Soon it becomes apparent that more than 200 pond herons were lurking in grass along about one-kilometre stretch of river-bank to the east. Now the first group of egrets appears from the east ---- a group of seventeen. Most of them appear to be cattle egrets, though one can hardly be cocksure in the fading light. The group settles on a rain tree beyond the babul fringe. Suddenly the whole throng of common mynahs from the bare slope is up in the air, flying low over water. This airborne army so unsettles a group of egrets, that they fly helter skelter. The whole mass swings upwards to reach the roosting trees and a deafening cackle ensues as the birds begin to settle.

The stream of pond herons continues. More and more groups of egrets in tens and twelves join the roost from the east. It is now 6.50. The moon is up, though still low on the eastern horizon. Fortunately it is the night of the full moon. Visibility is improved as the pale yet luminous disc gains brightness every moment. I can still count the flocks of egrets that appear strikingly beautiful against the background of a full moon. In about an hour on the river bank, I have counted about 320 egrets, 350 pond herons, more than 300 common mynahs and about 200 crows going to roost.

Just below me, on a rock by the water's edge sits a White-breasted Kingfisher. He is sitting quietly for the last twenty minutes. Presently his mate joins him. They change positions once or twice and vanish in the gathering darkness. The last stilt reaches his bretheren, the little grebes still appear to enjoy the midstream and lastly the group of egrets on the river just opposite me leaves for the roost in twos and threes. The bustle of men and birds around me has almost ceased and I am left alone.

As I retrace my steps several questions cross my mind. Where do the Brahminy Mynahs roost? So far I have not come across their communal roost. Why do they not associate with the common mynah? Why common mynahs gather at one place before flying into the trees? Is it only for rest or does it serve any social purpose? Does this communal roosting have any significance in the formation of a pair bond? With

the approach of the breeding season the roost will break up and pairs will occupy separate nesting territories.

During the day I have seen pairs of crows foraging in definite localities. It appears the crows mingle freely in the communal roost. The communal roost may give them a feeling of security. What happens to the pair bond then? How the pair unites once again in the morning? Does the communal roost help pond herons, usually a solitary creature, select his mate?

Search for answers to these questions will certainly provide a fascinating exercise in observation.

Helping the birds in distress by S.S. Saini

On 30th June I woke up at 4.30 hours to the calls of Bulbuls, common mynas, common swallows and house sparrows. It had rained heavily previous night and rain had just stopped when I came out into the compound. I have recently planted a lot of bougainvillea cuttings along the boundary fence of my residence and was just visiting these cuttings one by one. On one of the cuttings I saw a shining slaty grey bird clinging to it about one foot above the ground level in very peculiar fashion. I thought the bird was dead, perhaps some children after killing, had placed it in that position. The bird was sitting vertical on a large thorn of bougainvillea cutting and holding the stem with its tail and both the wings. The legs were retreated below the feathers. Even at my approach the bird did not move.

Only when I touched the bird and tried to lift it, did it leave the cutting and tried to get away from me. But it just could not fly, and only was able to hop a little. I caught hold of this bird and found it to be Ashy Swallow Shrike (*Artamus fuscus*). On thorough examination I found two very minor injuries, one on the right wing and second just near the left eye. I could not attribute any cause for the bird's inability to fly during the morning. May be, it was attacked by some other bird or animal and was suffering from the shock.

I brought the bird inside my house. The only dry place which could give the bird natural feeling of a nest, I could find; was a coir foot mat. I placed the bird on the foot mat, after drying its feathers and covered it with a bamboo basket.

After I left for the office, my three year old daughter fed the bird on uncooked dry rice and also gave it some water. Before leaving for office I had told her, to be careful not to injure the bird. She fed the bird twice and by about 10.00 hours the bird was not having any fear from her.

On my return from office in the afternoon I was told that the bird flew off at about 11.30 hours making a full untroubled flight to a tree about 50 Mts. away. I felt very happy with this incident because a bird has been saved. I think the bird had overcome the shock in the company of human being.

The same day in my office, I found one common swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) flying from wall to wall in one room of approximately 15' x 20' size. The bird had somehow entered the room in which about 10 people were working. Being scared of so many people, it was trying to get out of the room but every time it was hitting the wall like a blind and not using the open windows and doors for escape. There were four windows, two doors and two ventilators open, covering right up to about 2' below the ceiling. And the bird was flying as close to the ceiling as possible. It did not rest much and was tired very soon. It took me nearly ten minutes to catch hold of the bird. I confirmed the identification and offered water which the bird drank in quick gulps. The bird was virtually gasping for about 3 minutes because of exhaustion. I kept the bird in my custody for about 10 minutes. Then I took it out and opened my palm. What beautiful glides it made in the wet air outside and how happy it was flying in the free space after remaining a captive for more than half an hour. I think this bird too carried good views about human beings.

Comments on April 1979 Newsletter by Lavkumar Khacher

1. Some Birds of the Kathmandu Valley by Jasper Newsome. This is a pleasant account. How lucky indeed Newsome has been to spend such a long time in the delightful Vale! Among the galaxy of birds he has reported I seem to have missed a mention of the Dhayal or Magpie Robin. In June when I was in Kathmandu some fifteen years back I remember being impressed by the plentitude of this smart and melodious bird. One hopes Kathmandu has not become so urbanised as to be unfit for this lively creature.
2. More news from Dodda Gubbi by ZF, Page 13. I cannot help commenting on the matter of the Red Shanks having their legs "far from being red". If not red, they are a bright orange-yellow but always quite distinctive and infact at "this time of the year" is 27th March they would be coming into their nuptial best and their legs would be redder than at any other time of the year. Though one hesitates to question an identification by a heavyweight like Peter Jackson, might not these birds be Reeves? Raptors, waders, pipits, larks and of course warblers have been known to trip up even the most seasoned among ornithologists. After all, is it not said that to err is human?

3. Goldenbacked Woodpecker in Kutch by S.K. Reeves Page 9. I wholeheartedly agree with S.K. Reeves that the Pelican Club led by Himmatsinhji should know their birds - they do, and any comment by them is worthy of taking note. In fact, it is such records, and taking cognisance of them that will make our knowledge of bird distribution and bird behaviour complete. The Handbooks by Drs. Ripley and Ali are the measure of our present day knowledge and anything adding to those volumes improves our exactness-note for example the Blackcapped Kingfisher at Rajkot, and the unmistakeable description of the Blackbrowed Flycatcher Warbler at Meerut by Y.M. Rai (April 1979 NL page 14). As more and more amateurs - and competent ones like the members of the Pelican Club of Kutch and persons like Indra Kumar Sharma himself take to the field, the factual information provided by Salim Ali will assuredly be added to. This does not detract from the importance of the Handbooks rather it proves the great value of the effort by this eminent ornithologist. He has provided us a base to build on.

Sparrow Control in China by Dr. Ishwar Prakash

It is well known that the Chinese people had achieved remarkable success in controlling the sparrows which were considered to be crop pests. While in China for over one month recently, attending an UNEP sponsored Seminar on Desertification Control, we were amazed at the paucity of bird fauna in general in that country and that of sparrows in particular. Having had some experience of vertebrate pests, I had not expected that to locate a sparrow would be as thrilling as winning a Trophy!

We moved in railway trains and by road from the north of Taklamakan in northwestern China to the Gobi desert in the northeast, but it was only in parts of Sinkiang that we were able to see small flocks of sparrows. In other parts, especially around Peking, Shanghai and Hanchow, the bird was as rare as the Great Indian Bustard in India!

At the Institute of Zoology of the Chinese Academy of Science Beijing (Peking), I got an opportunity to discuss the matter of sparrow control and the way they had achieved such a remarkable success. The outstanding feature of the entire operation was that no chemical was used for the purpose. It was accomplished through a mass movement, every Chinese joining hands to kill or capture the poor birds by catapults, shot guns and nets and by physically destroying their nests. Ultimately, sparrows totally vanished from most parts of the large country. From the ecological standpoint such a drastic action was probably not warranted particularly when the sparrows feed their nestlings on insects which are injurious to food crops and other useful commodities. This has now been realised in China and the order for total destruction of sparrows has since been revoked.

What is appreciable in this effort is the almost total involvement of the common masses, scientific community, administrators and politicians in a common cause, and the utterly sincere manner in which the order for the eradication of a pest has been carried out without using any scientific technology. I hope we may show at least a part of this dedication and zeal in implementing our National Programme for Rodent Pest Management.

Our Ground-Birds by Corvus Splendens Teegayensis (Courtesy, Times of India, Bombay)

We House Crows have formed an Anthropological Society for studying the various ground-birds which infest our roosts and feeding-places. To further this worthy caws, I have prepared the following Note.

Inability to fly: The name "Ground-bird" comes from the creatures' inability to fly except by perching inside a sort of hollow tree-trunk that rushes forward with a horrible noise, swifter than an Alpine Swift. This inability, obviously due to their wings having withered into thin legs with five claws, illustrates their manifest inferiority to normal birds.

Protection: Plumage: Remarkably varied, with almost every known colour being displayed at various times by a single individual. Prof. C. Splendens Salimalius in his well-known Book of Indian Ground-Birds, asserts that all except the most bedraggled change their plumage at least once every day, presumably as a protective device to confuse enemies. He further notes that their juveniles, unlike ours, tend to wear more colourful plumage than their adults do.

Sexual differentiation: Extremely difficult, there being no plumage classable as exclusively male or exclusively female. Roughly fifty per cent of Ground-birds-especially at the fledgling, juvenile or subadult stages-are more graceful in appearance (sometimes with brighter plumage) and less aggressive in behaviour than the other fifty per cent; and some of these have a long head-crest (hanging down instead of standing erect in the normal manner). All these, as another expert (Prof. C. Splendens Lavkumarius) suggests, may be females.

Courtship: Mating and courtship, unfortunately, do not take place in the daytime, as with normal birds; and since mating must occur at sometime, we presume that this happens at night (probably inside the nestholes) at which time we are decently asleep. No Ground-bird eggs have been recorded, from which we must infer that the chicks are-incredibly-born alive.

Facial characteristics: The Ground-bird face is-to us, at least-repulsive. The eyes are set side by side, looking forward, as in Owls. The beak, through which they presumably breathe (since it serves no other discernible purpose), is placed above the mouth, which is full of teeth in the fashion

of our reptilian ancestors. And ears, instead of being small and decently hidden by feathers, are large and brazenly displayed.

Leg Propelled: Locomotion: Ground-birds walk as we do, or run like Wagtails and Junglefowl; they never hop like Robins and Sparrows. Sometimes they perch on branches which they propel with their legs. And some sit in large nests which somehow glide along the roads. Often two nests collide, and all the Ground-birds start calling excitedly.

Food and nesting: These are.. Auwrkk!(Juvenile Ground bird just hit me with stone on writing claw! A thousand droppings fall on his head! I'll have to rest a bit now, of caws..)

Correspondence

Garudas and Vultures by M.S. Ramamoorthi

I have gone through our Editor's notes on Thirukkalukundram in the March issue of the Newsletter.

I would like to state that the Editor seems to have had some misconception when he mentions in his note "...where the Garudas are supposed to come from Banaras every morning".

According to Hindu mythology, Garuda is Lord Vishnu's vahana (Carrier). Nowadays we call the Brahminy kite as Garuda, and the Hindus consider it very lucky to see this bird on Thursdays and Sundays. The Neophron (Vulture) is called as -kazhu ku - in Tamil.

So it would have been better if the Editor had used the word "Kaluku" instead of "Garuda".

I am sure you all know that the hill is named after the vultures (Neophrons) as tiru kazhuku kundram meaning the hill of the vulture.

House Sparrows nesting in Pant Pockets by K.K. Mandalaywala

I have seen House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) nesting in all sort of places inside the house like inside the meter-box, behind the books on book-shelf, inside the lamp shade and behind the photo frames hanging on the wall but for the first time, I have come across a sparrow nesting inside the pant pocket.

I had kept one of my pants hanging on the wall (by the nail) inside my bedroom (as most people often do) and was out of station for about two weeks. On coming back, one day, while entering the bedroom, I found a sparrow perching on the opening of the pant pocket. The bird,

on seeing me flew out from the room. Having got suspicious on the bird's activity, I emptied the pocket to examine and to my utter surprise, four pale dirty white eggs rolled out and fell to the floor, breaking them in the process. The yolk of two of the eggs were found to have some traces of blood.

I am still wondering why this sparrow had chosen the pant pocket for nesting when plenty of nesting sites were available in the room, which were safe from their point of view.

Somebody please identify, by Baldev Mitra

Dina Nagar (24 Km. south of Pathankot) is just little short of the foothills. During my birdwatching on 20-1-1979 evening (5.45 p.m.) I saw two birds taking short-distance flights along the railway line vegetation. The birds were about double the size of common house sparrow hued blackish blue, or the colour used by the artists to depict lord Krishna. It can conveniently be compared with the European sparrow-hawk as to size. Two striking facts were observed about these birds:-

- 1) The crest bore winglets in upright converging fashion as if advertising the age old adage "To make one's hair stand on end". The plummy crest can as well be compared with a maiden having tied her hair after a head wash or full bath.
- 2) Secondly, at the end of its right leg, there was a mark, of the sizes of injection-syringe-needle and about 3mm wide, bright red in colour.

Our Contributors: Their addressess

M.H. Himmatsinhji, Jubilee Ground, Bhuj, Kutch.
 Mr. Sumant R. Shah, A,20, Shaktisadan, Lamington Road, Bombay 7.
 Mr. Prakash Gole, 277, Sindh Colony, Pune 4110 07.
 Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, 14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360 004.
 Dr. Ishwar Prakash, c/o. Mr. H.S. Mann, Director, Indian Council of Agricultural Research Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur.
 Mr. S.S. Saini, Asstt. Conservator of Forests, Preinvestment Survey of Forest Resources in Bhutan, Sarbhang: Bhutan.
 Mr. Corvus Splendens Teegayensis, c/o. The Times of India, Bombay.
 Mr. M.S. Ramamoothi, 5/15, Middle Street, Mudikondan 609502.
 Mr. K.K. Mandalaywala, Qtr No.579-D2, D. Sector, Piplani, Bhopal 462021.
 Mr. Baldev Mitra, c/o. M/s. Chet Ram Bihari Lal, Inside Panjari Gate, Dina Nagar, Gardeshpur, 143531

Subscriptions for 1979 have been received from:

Gujarat: Mr. Pradyumna K. Desai, Takhteshwar Plot, Bhavnagar 364002 Rs.15/-;
M/s. Viktram A. Sarabhai Community Science Centre, Opp. Pharmacy College,
Navrangpura, Ahmedabad 380 009.

Tamil Nadu: The Madras Snake Park, Guindy Deer Park, Madras 600 022, Rs.15/-;
Mary K. McNabb, Bethesda Hospital, P.O. Ambur, North Arcot District, Tamil
Nadu, Rs.15/-; Mr. Gift Siromaney, Prof. of Statistics, Madras Christian
College, Tambaram, Chengelpet District, Madras 600 059, Rs.15/-;

Bhutan: Mr. S.S. Saini, PISRF, Bhutan, Rs.15/-;

Maharashtra: Mrs. Rhona Ghate, Shivangaon, Nagpur 440 019, Rs.16;

West Bengal: Mr. A.S. Bhaduri, 58-D, Alipore Road Calcutta 700 027, Rs.15/-;

Karnataka: Mr. A.D.M. Krishnan, "Kamala Nilaya", 477, X Main Road, Raj-
mahal Vilas Extension, Bangalore 560 006, Rs.25.

New Delhi: Toby Neil Sinclair, C-274, Defence Colony, New Delhi 110 024, Rs.30.



Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 6 JUNE, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XIX No.6

June 1979

Contents

The Bird Phenomenon of Haflong, by S. Theodore Baskaran.
Birding in Gingee (Tamil Nadu), by T. Koneri Rao.
The Birds of Dodda Gubbi Part II, by Lavkumar Khacher.
Identification of Harriers by S.K. Reeves.

Correspondence

Pinkheaded Ducks, by Sarah Jameson.
Which Tit is this? by J.L. Singh.
Spotted Sandpiper, by H.R. Krishna Murthy.
Honeyguides by J.S. Serrao.
The Calls of the Indian Koel by ZF.

Our Contributors

Subscriptions

The Bird Phenomenon of Haflong, by E. Theodore Backaran

The phenomenon had been occurring for decades. But it was only after E.P. Gee wrote on 'The Bird Mystery of Haflong' in his book 'The Wildlife of India' in 1964 did bird-watchers learn about it. On certain winter nights, birds of many varieties crash around petromax lamps put up by the villagers of Jatinga, near Haflong in Assam. No authentic observation has been made till last year - Gee himself could not see the birds - and nothing has been published on the subject.

Jatinga is a tiny village, 5 km from Haflong, perched atop a ridge at a height of 3500 feet, in North Cachar hills, which forms a part of Shillong plateau. The village overlooks a horse-shoe shaped valley, thickly covered with mixed-evergreen forests. In 1905, U.L. Suchiang, a Jaintia tribal headman settled 100 Jaintia families in this spot, that being desirable from the point of security. (Suchiang's grandson is the headman of the village now and gave us this account.) On a winter night a Jaintia was walking with a lit torch and some birds fell around him. Realising that the birds were attracted by light, the villagers began putting up lights and collect birds for the pot. By 1926 the operation had got well organised and acquired the sanction of tradition. Every winter they put up lights. But the birds came only when certain weather conditions were fulfilled and this happened only on a few days. There should be fog and no moon. Southern wind and drizzle heightened the chances of birds coming.

On 10-10-78 I was at Jatinga village with some friends from the Life Sciences Department of the North Eastern Hill University Shillong. We took up position at 11.30 p.m. The seventh-day moon had just disappeared behind the hills. A petromax lamp was kept at the edge of ridge. Half the lamp was covered with a cardboard and through the other half the beam was directed over the valley. We sat behind the lamps with some jaintia youth. Cigarettes passed around and our purpose explained we became part of the group. Myriads of moths were fluttering in the beam of the light. A boy stood with a long, thin, flexible, bamboo pole, which he used as a whip to hit the birds, and lashed desultorily, practising his aim at the moths. As a ghostly fog swept across the beam of the light, the valley was lit up by the reflection, creating strange lighting effects like in a modern theatre.

Suddenly out of the fog a bird shot out and fell near us. It was a White-breasted water hen. Even as I sat transfixed at this incredible sight, one after another two more birds flew right into the verandah on which we were sitting, hit the wall and fell down. They were Indian Water Rails, a bird about which bird-watchers read, but rarely get to see. As they fell the birds were too stunned to take-off again and were easily picked up. Those birds that flew across the beam of light were brought down by a deft use of the bamboo whip. Some escaped the whip and flew into darkness.

It was well past midnight and we had logged about 11 species. A slight drizzle began and the air once again was filled with fog. The boy with the bamboo whip grew taut and peered into the fog. We could hear the distant calls of some kind of ducks. There were many of them. Very soon the air around us was reverberating with their frantic calls. Two ducks dived into a thicket near the light and were picked up - Lesser Whistling teals. I recalled that their call was so different from the low whistle they utter in flight. We kept vigil till 4 a.m. and when we picked our way towards the jeep, dawn was already cracking over the valley. Our bags were full of precious cargo-for identification and observation. We had listed 12 species and in our spot 60 birds had been picked up that night.

What causes this phenomenon the like of which has not been recorded anywhere else in the world? Most of the birds that dived to their doom that night were diurnal ones, not a single nocturnal bird, though there are plenty of Himalayan Night-jars and owls around. Also no bird of prey showed up, though we spotted Shikra, Kestrel and Crested Serpent eagles in that area later. Nor do any of the common birds - mynas, crows and babblers - that hang around Haflong town get attracted by the lights.

Almost all the birds that come are residents and only two species were migratory - the Whistling Teal and the Water Rail. They too must have come from the dense forest that clothes the slopes around, where they had taken temporary winter residence. (Earlier it was thought by many that only birds on their migratory route got attracted by the lights). One thing seems clear. The birds are disturbed from their nightly roosts by some factor and take off. Once in the air, they get attracted by the lights. (Nocturnal birds being used to street and car lights are not bothered). What is it that disturbed and provoked them to get airborne in the night?

The most plausible explanation came from M. Krishnan to whom I was narrating my Haflong experience when I met him in Madras last January. He said that the light beams, thrown across the valley simulated dawn when they hit the rolling fog and birds left their roosts and took off. Once air-borne they got disoriented and crashed around the lamps.

Birds collected on 10-10-1978 at Jatinga. Pond Heron, Grey Drongo, Hooded Pitta, Indian Ruddy Kingfisher, Threetoed Forest Kingfisher, White-breasted Waterhen, Thick-billed Green Pigeon, Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon, Red Turtle Dove, Paradise Flycatcher, Lesser Whistling Teal, Indian Water Rail.

Birding in Gingee (Tamil Nadu), by T. Koneri Rao

One pleasant evening V.J. Rajan and myself reached Gingee, and after resting for a while we proceeded towards Krishnagiri Hill. There was sufficient evening light and we came upon Indian Robins, Brahminy Mynas and a group of quarrelsome common mynas. A King Crow was hunting insects from the top of a fence. A pair of Brahminy Mynas were collecting building material but when they saw us they dropped the material, probably to avoid giving the impression that they were nesting. After crossing the main road to Thiruvannamalai, we went up an incline keeping the rampart wall to our left. A pair of Tree Pies were searching for a meal among the stones forming the rampart. A Whitebreasted Kingfisher sitting on a nearby stone was also watching the Tree Pies. Suddenly from no where a Shikra alighted very close to the Tree Pies with a fearsome look. There was a squeal and all of them took off, the Tree Pies following on the heels of the Shikra. A female Indian Robin which watched the pell-mell for some time started moving towards its nest to see whether its three nestlings were safe. We got down the moat to inspect the robin's nest when a mongoose crossed the path. The nest was built in the rampart wall at a height of 4' and it contained 3 blind young ones. We sat for a while when we heard the Brainfever Bird. When the robins knew that the danger was over they started collecting insects to feed the young. A Whitebreasted Kingfisher came along and with some prey in its beak it sat facing the rampart wall. The light started fading but that did not prevent the Brainfever Bird from calling. When the Sun sank a pair of Spotted Owlets came out from one of the crevices of the rampart. Not far from the owls a pair of Common Mynas had their young. At dusk only a King Crow and the Brainfever Bird were calling. At last at 7.15 p.m. every bird was silent except the owlets which were calling intermittently. We were there till 8.00 p.m. but failed to hear any larger owls or nightjars.

On the morning of 16th July '78 at 6.00 a.m. we left for Rajagiri Hill. On the way we found another nest of the Indian Robin again with 3 blind young ones. We took a small cart track skirting the fortress, and here we saw a Whitebrowed Bulbul in a bush. A White Scavenger Vulture was circling over and while we were admiring the contrasty black and white pattern in the wings against the blue sky, another large bird wheeled over the hill with splayed wings. The underside of the bird was greyish white and we thought it was a buzzard. When we proceeded further on the cart track a pair of Purplerumped Sunbirds were seen energetically flying from bush to bush. It appeared that the male was leading its mate to low thorny branches as possible nesting sites for the inspection of the female. When we covered three furlongs on the track, we came across a Pied-crested Cuckoo in a bush. It allowed us to have a close look at a distance of 5'. Half a dozen Grey Partridges crossed the field as a group. A Redwinged Bushlark was making mouse-like calls from an uncultivated field. In a ruined building to our left we saw half a dozen Spotted Owlets which stared at us. In front of us was a fairly

big hillock and we ran our eyes over it for a possible Great Horned Owl but could not find any. A Tree Pie was calling harshly from a tree at the foot of the hill. From the direction of the hill we heard Bayas but could not locate them. On a raised portion of the ground Mr. Rajan found a one foot long porcupine quill. We skirted a tank and passed a Hanuman Temple and came to a raised platform from where we could overlook scrub jungle in between two hills. From the scrub we heard the calls of Yellow-eyed Babblers. Ten or fifteen Redrumped Swallows were flying over our heads and these birds were seen collecting wet mud from the tank. To our right the hill went up and here we saw a few pairs of House Swifts and Dusky Crag Martins. We retraced our steps and went to Rajagiri Hill listening to a Yellowthroated Sparrow on our way. Inside the fortress we flushed three Pied Kingfishers from the elephant tank. As we entered, a Grey Partridge ran in front of us and was heading towards the base of the Rajagiri Hill. A Tailor Bird was calling loudly in the open scrub. When we started climbing the hill a few House Swifts and Redrumped Swallows were flying around. In a Jamun tree a Yellowthroated Bulbul was seen eating the berries. We then heard some toad like noises which emanated from a pair of predatory birds which were engaged in a mock fight in mid air. They turned out to be a pair of Shahin Falcons. Immediately one of them disentangled itself and sat on a crag. The other bird was trying to dart at Dusky Crag Martins which were flying near the vicinity. With 3 or 4 quick wing beats it flew at the martins with tremendous velocity. One of them appeared to be much bigger than the other and throughout our stay it was seen sitting on a crag and preening its breast feathers. The other smaller bird was now and then calling "kek...kek...kek...kek" and stooping at the martins. During 4 or 5 attempts it made, it could not catch any martins. Once it sat on a 20 feet long ledge in the wall-like rock and looked intently for more than 15 minutes. Probably these falcons were breeding there and it appeared to me that they had young ones on the ledge. We watched these falcons for one hour and returned. While getting down a medium sized monitor lizard crossed the path from the direction of the granary, much to the anxiety of a Tailor Bird, which was calling persistently. A Common Wood Shrike was also seen. When we reached the main road we saw a beautiful pair of small minivets on a roadside tree.

I would like to know whether the Shahin falcons seen in Gingee are permanent residents of that area or do they come there for breeding. During my last visit to the place some 5 or 6 years ago, I remember, they were not to be seen nor heard. The Editor may throw some light on this as I feel that the sighting of these falcons is a rare event in South India.

(According to the Handbook Vol.I Page 351, Shaheen Falcon breed throughout the Indian Union, and in the Peninsula up to South Kerala.

I would also like to suggest that during such outings more intensive watching should be done on species whose habits are little known. For example with regard to the Yellowthroated Bulbul the Handbook Vol.6 Page 94 says : "General Habits : Little Known".) EDITOR

The Birds of Dodda Gubbi Part II, by Lavkumar Khacher

The Editor's Beat.

Locating the Editor proved a fascinating exercise in communication, and discommunication, through link languages, and de-linking languages. Infact we could have sat down in a grove of Casuarina trees and quite effectively argued the merits and demerits of English, Hindi and Chinese for that matter as languages of communication between the various States of our large and varied country. For a person like myself, who has grown into a cynic where most issues taken seriously by my compatriots are concerned, the exercise was hilarious and thoroughly enjoyable. Had we not had a car at our disposal, chauffeured by a driver professing to know English - quite different it turned out from the English a Gujarati speaks, or tries to speak, - and Hindi, we might never have got to our destination and ran our quarry to earth. Perhaps, I would never have dared to sally forth into the countryside without this symbol of anti conservation! So chauffeured by this multilingual chauffer and accompanied by the present Education Officer of WWF-India, a Konkani Brahmin who by virtue of his geographical existence - Bombay - speaks Gujarati (intelligibly), Hindi culled from the Hindustani films, and has a miasmatic understanding of Kanarese through his own Konkani, and of course English, without which he might have been a laborer, a multi millionaire, a very successful politician or a bootlegger or smuggler but certainly not what he is at the moment (!) set off into the countryside north of Bangalore City.

It's lovely country, undulating like the surface of the ocean, the road rising and falling as might a boat over crests of rollers and down into their troughs. The red soil, rich green fields of irrigated rice, dense stands of eucalyptus and casuarinas looked lovely under a blue sky. Along the road stood avenue trees, huge banyans, rain trees, rusty shield bearers grandly aloof like scions of ancient families being jostled by the plebian crowds. Sad too like them for they were remnants of what must have been a grand, shaded avenue.

Well, after many a halt to inquire - at one point the driver was seen scratching his head as a white clad local vehemently declaimed "Futehally ille!!" All along I imagined "ille" stood for "yes", and felt smugly satisfied that we'd soon be there. But the look of consternation on the driver's face suggested there was something wrong. Luckily Chandra-kant, our other linguist, via his Konkani suddenly realised that the worthy local was denying the existence of any village called Fute-hally - "ille" to my chagrin meant "No" and village names here often end with

a "halli" - so he was saying "Fute Halli ille". We hastily asked to be guided to Dodda Gubbi and not "Fute Halli". As it turned out, we were just a couple of undulations away from this village and eventually, bumping over a furrowed country road we ended up in a photogenically attractive village and asked to be directed to the Post Office - a single room innocent of any furnishing other than a rickety table and some hay on the floor. Over the door was a prominent red board "No Admission" it said. The postman was out, a crowd of starry-eyed children surrounded us. "Yes! they know Futehally". All I gathered from their babbler-like chatter was a word "Kudrai" repeated several times. Did the person I want to meet have a horse I was asked in Hindi-English-Kannereese by the driver. "Well....." it was my turn to scratch my head, just then the postman arrived. A pleasant fellow. On being questioned, he produced his registration receipt book and showed me our editor's signature. A man of few words apparently. He had just come from there and yes, the Kudrai-person was at home. Kudrai incidently is Kannereese for horse. And so we reached our destination. Thanks to a horse!

This rather long and quite unbirdy preamble perhaps has given my readers an idea of the type of bucolic surroundings the Editor has retreated to. Every morning he saddles his "Kudrai" and rides out into the countryside. Every evening he goes for a walk and I joined him as his evening outings to view his beat and the birds that inhabit it.

Adjoining the Futehally property is the farm of Ghorpade. We walked over to say "Hello!" and were given a very warm welcome. Here there is a grove of jack fruit trees, shady and cool and inhabited by several Grey Drongos already mentioned in Part I flitting among the troughs. Their excited chatter perhaps indicated an eagerness to be getting away to their Himalayan abode. A few tall silver oaks with orange inflorescences seemed to be their favourite bickering points.

The Dodda Gubbi lake is a short walk from the house. It is a tranquil sheet of water with green, closely cropped grass verges. Here in March the winter visitors are still around, several Greenshanks. This is the first time I've seen so many Greenshanks. In the north, these large sandpipers are far fewer, and one sees more Redshanks around. A couple of Common Sandpipers went low over the placid waters and a Jack Snipe jumped up from the water's edge to rise steeply and it flew off along an erratic course to the opposite bank. Other birds visible around the lake were Lesser Egrets, and a Brahminy Kite laboriously flew over trying to gain altitude to start its circling glides.

On our way to the lake we saw a couple of Pale Harriers sail past, twist and side swipe at some prey in the grass, wonderful birds to watch in their effortless flight rising and falling to the smallest undulations of the ground. A Marsh Harrier was also seen quartering

the far side of the lake scattering Paddy Birds (Pond Herons) before it as it went. A small flock of half a dozen Lesser Whistling Teal looked unhappy at the presence of the harriers. I was surprised at not seeing any Little Grebes, wintering ducks and other waterside birds we take so much for granted in the north. I was able to spot only a few Little Ringed Plovers and a couple of Temminck's Stints on the lakeside.

Skirting the water's edge we approached the earthen dam on which a few badly mutilated Pongamia trees bespoke of a more benign past. A lovely male Golden Oriole flitted in ahead of us and flitted and posed among the scraggly branches offering a view I've never enjoyed better. A lovely bird indeed with a lovely call. A little further three Pied Kingfishers made a beautifully effective frieze perched on a trailing branch - a picture worthy of a Gould or an Audubon. One of the birds flew up and hovered to our great delight before plunging down to secure a hapless silvery fish with which it flew off low over the water. This set the other two into action and for some time the elegant birds hovered and dived and hovered again going further from us till a bright flash of blue and white drew our attention to a Whitebreasted Kingfisher as it flew past to settle on a boulder near the water's edge. Just then a Common Kingfisher went skimming past shining like a little jewel against the rich emerald green of the newly sown paddy below the dam.

Large Pied Wagtails were common and did not keep close to the water as one expects them to, perhaps they have not read what the ornithologists have to say about them. All the other wagtails - the various races of the White and Yellow Wagtails and the Yellowheaded Wagtail were conspicuous by their absence. A couple of Grey Wagtails quietly fed along the water channels among the paddy. It was good to see the Indian Pipit, our resident species, among short grass and running over fallow land. The salient features of this bird which further north is often confused with several wintering species, were quite obvious and I hope to be able to unhesitatingly point out one of these birds when I meet it among others of its genus again. A few Tree Pipits - Indian by their less heavily streaked breasts - identified themselves by a very characteristic habit of flying up into the branches of near by large trees when disturbed.

Though pipits are related to wagtails they superficially resemble larks with which group they share grasslands, open country and pasture lands. At Dodda Gubbi we saw medium-sized flocks of what appeared to be Little Indian Skylarks. I never got a good view of them and should not like to be quite assertive. A small flock of Ashy-crowned Finch-Larks were, however, quite unmistakable and I suspect seeing and hearing a couple of Redwinged Bushlarks.

Walking through the fallow fields the commonest bird was the Pied Bushchat. The smartly attired males had staked out their territories and were in full song. There were suprisingly few Indian Robins and we totally missed the Magpie Robin. The Black Redstart which should have been around had apparently left for the north.

Along the hedgegrows - the few scraggly ones that has survived the present day anarchic free-grazing and tresspassing across properties by fuel gatherers - were several Brown Shrikes and Black Drongos. The former would soon be off for Central Asia while the latter would be turning their attention to nesting. The hedgegrows and bushes overhanging road side ditches offered welcome vantage points for Little Green Bee-eaters which apparantly nested in the exposed embankments as proved by the many tell tale holes. Excavating into the gritty soil of the southern Indian plateau must be quite wearisome for beak and claw and as we walked over the fields we marvelled at the hardness of the soil under foot.

On the opposite side of the lake, which we reached after passing a couple of "hallis", is a lovely bit of farmland with dense patches of casuarinas and a grove of wonderfully old and large Mahuva trees. Here at dusk can be seen several Spotted Owlets and perhaps a few other owls as well. It was here that I saw my first Whiteheaded Babblers. They are aptly named, the grey of the head is so light as to pass as white, otherwise they might be Jungle Babblers in body form, general colour and habits. Their call notes are another distinctive point of identification - mere shrill and shrilling. We observed a pair call in unison which, alas in my typically careless manner, I failed to record immediately. The pair call with such high precision that their combined sounds can be mistaken for a single call. A lot of work has been done on the Jungle Babbler and one would like to know whether this sort of dueting has been recorded in that closely related species. Scimitar Babblers are recorded as having duets but no reference of this being an accomplishment of the Whiteheaded Babbler or its close relative the Jungle Babbler has been made.

Most birdwatchers tend between two extremes of attitude where warblers are concerned - that of feigning to overlook their existence, or of showing their capability of being able to tell one little brown and nondescript bird from a very similar confusing and nondescript bird. Luckily my bluff was not called since there

were very few wintering warblers around except the numerous Blyth's Reed Warblers. A few Tailor birds were around by their distinctive calls and I saw both the Indian Longtailed and Ashy Longtailed Warblers. This was ideal country for all three and their presence might be taken for granted and so overlooked.

On 15th March, we had sat down on the Dodda Gubbi dam to admire the late afternoon view over the emerald green paddy, the large grove of trees highlighted by the warm rays of the setting sun, and to admire a Large Pied Wagtail singing from a clod among the paddy. A fairly stiff breeze blew in from the east - the Bay of Bengal. Further away a man was walking through the rice when before him a flock of Spotted Sandpipers rose with their characteristic shrill calls and flew up and into the wind. This struck me as strange - flying right away and I jocularly mentioned to my editorial companion that he should note the date (15th March), the time (5.25 p.m.) and wind direction (east) since these birds were off on migration. "I guess you are right" he humourously replied. Imagine our delight when from another quarter of the green paddy bowl another flock of sandpipers rose abruptly and flew away into the wind. There was no human being this time. Very soon, we heard the excited shrilling of hundreds of sandpipers invisible in the rice and then flocks of 50, 100, 75, birds started rising and flying off into the wind towards the east. We were indeed watching a migration. By the time the last flock left the large, orange orb of the sun had touched the tree tops and we rose to return home via a wagtail roost where some fifty odd Large Pied Wagtails collected for the night in a densely foliated tree leaning over a ditch of water. Unfortunately, the birds had changed their sleeping place.

It was an all together enjoyable visit - my first to the South. If there is to be any integration, I strongly recommend making bird-watching a compulsory subject in all schools in India. As for language I have my great reservations: Gujarati English, Punjabi English, Madrasi English are all divisive; and talking of language, even the Large Pied Wagtails of Bangalore sing a Kanerese version of so very different from the Gujarati Large Pied Wagtail!! It sure is wonderful to belong to such a large country where even birds have dialects.

Identification of Harriers by S.K. Reeves

In writing to our Editor recently, I mentioned that there had been a considerable influx of Hen Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*) to the North Norfolk coast.

In reply, he told me that he had several harriers near his home, but had difficulty in identifying them, and asked me to write a brief note on the subject. I do so with trepidation, as the subject is complicated and my knowledge limited. However, with the assistance of the literature on the subject, I will do my best to comply with his request and briefly give the main field identification features.

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

Marsh Harriers are comparatively larger and more heavily built than the other Harriers, have broader wings, and are generally found frequenting marshes.

The male is distinguished from all the other males by the colour combination brown and grey in its plumage - brown body, silvery grey tail and largely silvery grey wings.

The female is a dark, chocolate brown bird with a creamy head, throat and shoulders. There is never any white on the rump.

Generally, the juveniles are like the females. The plumage of females and juveniles, however, are somewhat variable.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

The male is a grey bird with mainly white under-parts (chin, throat and upper breast are grey) and a clear white rump-patch. Primaries and tips of secondaries black. No black wing-bar.

The female is a dark brown bird with streaked under-parts and a clear white rump-patch.

Immature birds are like the females with streaked rufous under-parts.

Pale Harrier (*Circus macrourus*)

The male is very much like the male Hen Harrier, but the upper-parts are paler, the whole of the under-parts are white, and the rump-patch is greyish and very much less conspicuous.

The female is only very doubtfully distinguishable in the field from the female Hen Harrier by its smaller, less distinct rump-patch.

Juveniles are only distinguishable from those of Hen Harriers by unstreaked rufous under-parts.

Montague's Harrier (Circus pygargus)

The male is distinguished from the male Hen Harrier by having rusty streaks on the under-parts, a greyish rump-patch and two black wing bars.

The female is almost identical with the female of the Hen Harrier, except that it is slightly slimmer in build and has a slightly less conspicuous rump-patch.

Immature birds are like the females, but with unstreaked, rich rufous under-parts. Indistinguishable in the field from immature Pale Harriers.

Pied Harrier (Circus melanoleucos)

The male cannot possibly be confused with any of the other Harriers as it is a conspicuously pied bird with a grey tail.

The female is doubtfully distinguishable in the field from female Pale and Montague's Harriers. Just possibly by blunter wings and heavier flapping flight.

Immatures are darker than the females but field identification is not possible with certainty.

Abbreviated Summary of Field Identification Features (Adult Birds Only)Marsh Harrier

Male: Large, brown and rufous, grey on wings and tail.

Female: Large, dark brown, pale (creamy) crown, throat and shoulder patches. Never any white on rump.

Hen Harrier

Male: Grey with white belly, and clear, white rump patch.
Secondaries tipped black, but no wing bars.

Female: Brown, streaked under-parts, clear white rump-patch.

Pale Harrier

Male: Paler grey than Hen Harrier, all white under-parts,
no white rump-patch, no wing bars.

Female: Very doubtfully distinguishable from female
Hen Harrier (Has smaller rump-patch).

Montague's Harrier

Male: Grey with rusty-streaked under-parts, greyish rump-patch,
black wing bars.

Female: Like female Hen Harrier, but slimmer and with smaller
rump-patch.

Pied Harrier.

Male: Pied with a grey tail.

Female: Practically indistinguishable from female Pale and Montague's
harriers; perhaps by blunter wings and heavier flapping flight.

CorrespondencePinkheaded Ducks by Sarah Jameson

Though my April-June 78 Hornbill magazine came ages ago, I have only just started reading it. On Page 4 is the President's letter, headed Mystery Birds of India, the Pinkheaded Duck. Having read "the last authentic sighting of a live Pinkheaded Duck in the wild was in June 1935 by C.M. Inglis, a competent field ornithologist, in the Dharbanga district of Bihar." I then hunted through my file marked Bird Correspondence to find some old letters on this subject. I quote from my letter to you, dated June 1969. .."A letter I received from my husband today contains a bombshell of which he is quite unaware! He casually mentions having seen a Pinkheaded Duck on Chhora Beel in Galsi Police Station area, Burdwan District, West Bengal, in 1939". Your reply dated 17-6-69 .. "Many thanks for your note on the Pinkheaded Duck. Could you please let me have the exact locations of Chhora Beel and the Ajai River." In the Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Volume 9, Number 6, 1969, June, you quoted my letter. After it, you added the following, "There have been many mistakes between the Pinkheaded Duck (*Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*) and the Redcrested Pochard (*Netta rufina*). It would be worthwhile getting further details of this observation since the writer of the note is reputed to be a careful and knowledgeable observer. No aspersions are cast, but one cannot be too careful in these matters. ED."

I quote from my husbands original letter to me, "During the cold weather of 1939/40, I camped for a night on the banks of the Chhora Beel, along with two friends, Mr and Mrs Webb. Bill Webb was later to build the famous swing railway bridge across the Suez Canal during the war.

This beel had fairly thick sal jungle on three sides, and lies about a mile or a little less, south of the Ajai river. The beel was fairly shallow, with dense grass and reeds all round the comparatively small area of clear water near the middle, and was infested with the largest buffalo leeches I have ever seen! In those days the beel was extremely difficult to reach, and the duck on it could hardly have been disturbed at all. My friends and I hoped to get a shot at the duck by forcing our way through the grass and reeds, but without success. The leeches finally forced us to beat a retreat!

One of us fired a shot in the air to get the birds to rise. Quite a number of them got up, amongst which I remember Teal, Pochard and Mallard. A section of the birds flew fairly low over us and in the good late afternoon light I saw a bird of roughly Mallard size which had a dark body and a pale pink head and neck. The view I had was partly from underneath and partly from the side as the bird wheeled.

I called out to my friends that I thought I had seen a Pinkheaded Duck, which I knew to be rare. A few minutes later, as the birds wheeled again, we saw the bird, and we agreed that it was almost a certainty that it was a Pinkheaded Duck. I used to be very fond of shooting and knew all the commoner varieties of duck very well. I certainly know the Redcrested Pochard of which I have shot a number in the past, and the pinkheaded bird I saw was certainly not a Redcrested Pochard."

Jerdon writes, "This very lovely duck is most common in parts of Bengal.." My husband saw it in Bengal, and on a most inaccessible beel which must have been largely undisturbed. Moreover he used to be a keen shot and had seen and handled all the commoner varieties. Unfortunately we could not follow this up ourselves in 1969, as we went on leave early in 1970, and he passed on a few months after we returned from leave.

Which Tit is this? by J.L. Singh

On 11th May I took a long walk along the railway track starting from Siliguri Jn. and walking towards Alipurduar. The line passes through tea-gardens and affords good birding.

I observed a group of 3 tits in a leafless tree. The first one I examined matched the Nepal Grey Tit (*Parus major nepalensis*) in description. I am assuming that it is the sub-species *Nepalensis* only from the location. From observation alone it may have been any of the other Grey Tits. What intrigued me was that the second member of the party had its cheeks, sides of neck and body white like the White Winged Black Tit (*Parus nuchalis*) which according to the Handbook Vol. 9 does not exist in this area at all. Before I could study other details the birds flew off. The latter bird's median stripe ended around the breast and did not extend upto the vent. Was it a variation of the Nepal Grey Tit or was it a Whitewinged Black Tit? I would be obliged if this is clarified.

Spotted Sandpiper by H.R. Krishna Murthy

It was 7.30 in the morning on 1st April 1979. We were watching birds at the marshy ground on the eastern edge of the Indian Institute of Science Campus. Our attention was attracted by a solitary Spotted Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) which flew over our head and landed close to a open well at the ground level ahead of us. There is a long granite slab at this well. One end of the slab overlooks the water in the well. The sandpiper briskly walked on to this end. Huddling its legs close to the body, it settled on the slab with its belly and breast touching the slab. The bird was in this position without any movement for fifty minutes between 7.45 and 8.35 a.m. It appeared as though it was basking in the pleasant sunshine when cattle and little egrets were busy filling their belly. It was

then disturbed by a grazing buffalo. Immediately afterwards we thoroughly inspected the spot, water in the well and the surroundings, but found nothing. We had not seen a sandpiper sit at a place without any movement for such a long time during the morning's bright sunshine. Would any of our readers enlighten us?"

Honeyguides by J.S. Serrao

It was interesting to read Mr. S.R. Shah's article Orange Honeyguides and Bullfinch...in the Newsletter (Vol.19(5):5-6).

Mr. Shah speaks about the 'mystery of the snow-white combs being solved a day later' and that a species of wasp approach the honeycomb in a swarm, panic off the bees, and eat away their eggs (may be their grubs too). However, I would point out to Mr. Shah that the mystery of the white combs has already been solved by Mr. S.A. Hussain of the Bombay Natural History Society in the autumn of 1977, and a note to this effect has been circulated among the members of the Society, and another write-up on the subject is under publication in the Society's Journal. What Mr. Shah points out as 'solving of the mystery' is it a fresh observation which supports Mr. Hussain's findings? Mr. Hussain's findings were in the autumn months in the Bhutan Himalayas, and one gets the feeling that this phenomenon takes place in that or winter season. Mr. Shah's observation appear to have been made in the summer in the Garhwal Himalayas. If so one gets the impression that such attacks by wasps take place throughout the year. Will Mr. Shah please confirm?

It is also difficult to reconcile oneself as to how Mr. Shah sexed the Honeyguides in the field (2 males together, and five females) when there exists no sexual dimorphism in the Honeyguides. The two males together referred to by him is also intriguing, for it is invariably always abandoned honeycombs are said to be the exclusive territory of one single male and a bevy of his females.

The Calls of the Indian Koel by ZF

Readers are reminded of the Project initiated by Madhav Gadgil regarding keeping track of the Koel population by means of the calls of the male bird, Ku-hoo Ku-hoo every morning. In my garden there are at least 2 males calling at this time of the year.

I hope to get a few replies from readers during the course of the coming month.

Our Contributors: Their addressess

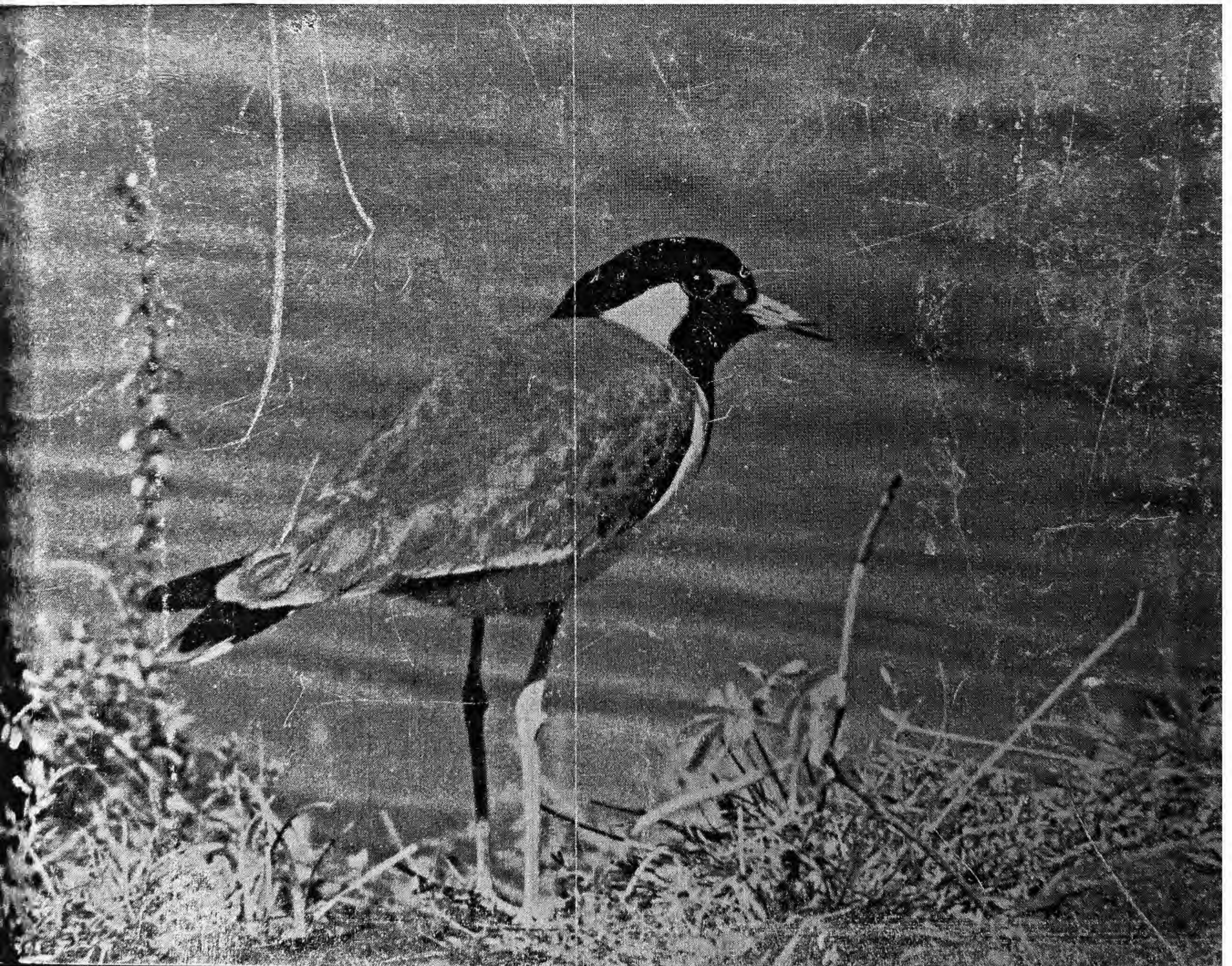
Mr. Koneri Rao, 14, Thandavarayan Mudali Street, Triplicane, Madras 5.
 Mr. S. Theodore Baskaran, Kelsel Cottage, Oakland, Shillong 793001.
 Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, 14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360 004.
 Mr. S.K. Reeves, 6, Town Close, Holt, Norfolk, England.
 Mr. J.S. Serrao, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House,
 S.B. Singh Road, Bombay 400 023.
 Mr. H.R. Krishna Murthy, Science Officer, All India Radio, Bangalore 1.
 Mr. J.L. Singh, 596-A, Saraspur Colony, No.1, Western Railway,
 Ahmedabad 380 018.
 Mrs. Sarah Jameson, Culmore, Coonoor, Nilgiris.

Subscriptions for 1979 have been received from:

Gujarat: Mr. M.B. Khatri, c/o. Bapu Abdullah Khatri, Khatri Chowk,
 Bhuj 370 001, Rs.15/-;
Tamil Nadu: Mr. T. Koneri Rao, 14, Thandavarayan Mudali Street,
 Triplicane, Madras 600 005, Rs.15/-;
 Mr. B. Vijayaraghavan, IAS, No.G-89, Anna Nagar, Madras 40 Rs.15/-;
U.P. : Mr. Anil Prasad, Charlton Lodge, Naini Tal 263001, Rs.15/-;
M.P. : Mr. A.K. Mitra, B.M.E., Quarter No.B/13, P.O. Birla Vikash,
 District Stana, 485005, Rs.15/-;
Delhi: Mr. Aditya Arya, c/o. Dr. V. Arya, St. Stephen's College,
 110 007, Rs.10/-;
Maharashtra: Mr. David Fernandes, Laxmi Krupa, Ist Floor, T.P.S.III,
 Road No.24, Bandra, Bombay 400 050, Rs.30/-;
From Abraod: Mr. Ashok Kumar, Al-Futtain Tower Scaffolding, P.O.Box
 5502, Dubai-U.A.E., Rs.150/-;
 Mr. Harvey Gilston, ch.des Mouettes 16, CH-1007 Lausanne, Switzerland,
 5 pounds .

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 8 AUGUST, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDBATCHERS

Vol. XIX No. 8

August 1979

Short Notes and Correspondence

Notes from Saurashtra by Lalsinh Raul (Communicated by Lavkumar Khacher).

My Comments on My Own Comments! by Lavkumar Khacher.

Miscellaneous Notes by M.H. Himmatsinhji.

On Gingee and Haflong by Peter Jackson.

Notes from Madras by V. Santharam.

A new dimension to birdwatching by E.R.C. Davidar.

A romantic roseringed parakeet by Kishor K. Gohil.

Waterhens by Ananta Mitra.

Egrets and Cormorants by Indra Kumar Sharma.

Occurrence of otters in Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary by R.K. Bhatnagar,
and M. Raizada.

Feeding competitor of nestlings of Painted Stork by R.K. Bhatnagar,
and M. Raizada.

The range of the Blackwinged Kite by Narayan Deb.

Crows feeding on Newspapers by T.V. Jose.

Tailor Birds on Papaya leaves by T.V. Jose.

Subscriptions

This issue of the Newsletter contains only short notes and correspondence. A number of letters had accumulated and correspondence must not be delayed beyond a point otherwise it loses its purpose.

Editor

Short Notes and Correspondence

Notes from Saurashtra by Lalsinh Raol (Communicated by Lavkumar Khacher.

This year, (June 1979), we are not experiencing normal weather conditions. It is not as hot as it should be. Even Ahmedabad had rain. One hopes the monsoon rains will be good.

The lake in front of my house has very little water, the least in the last four years. I spend upto an hour every morning watching the birds on the water. I can watch the fifty flamingos and twenty or twenty two Lesser Flamingos sitting in my balcony! They have been here now for quite some time. Despite it being June, there are some 100 to 150 Avocets still around. Normally Blackwinged Stilts are more plentiful on our fresh water reservoirs, but here they take second place to the Avocets.

Some two dozen Lesser Whistling Teal arrived for a few days and then abruptly departed for more congenial surroundings. Three Nuktas are still around. Though both these ducks are resident in India, I have never before seen them on this lake for so long a duration. There are around a hundred Dabchicks on the water, though wintering waders have largely departed. Even so, a few Blacktailed Godwits, Redshanks, Ruffs, Dunlin, and Curlew Sandpiper can be seen along the water's edge.

Some among the many Whiskered Terns flying around over the water have come into their breeding plumage. They look extremely handsome and their English name is most appropriate. Apparently this tern does not breed in our area whereas the very similar Blackbellied does according to Dharmakumarsinhji. He states that both this latter species and the River Tern are our breeding terns, even so, I have not yet seen the Blackbellied Tern. This time even the River Tern has not put in a appearance. Apart from the

Whiskered, the Gullbilled Tern, the Caspian Tern and the elegant Whitewinged Black Tern are still around many in their nuptial plumes. The most plentiful are the Whiskered Terns. They present a great sight as a hundred of them flutter against the stiff breeze making swoops to pick up food from the water or mud. The Whitewinged Black Tern is the least plentiful, usually a single bird passing through.

After you recorded the knot the Pirotan Island last February, I also saw it on a later visit. In May I saw a pair of Rednecked Phalaropes on this lake. Thus I've started 1979 with two new additions to my Life List. Both the phalaropes were in summer plumage - one was brighter than the other. Like Bustard Quails (and Painted Snipe) it is the lady phalarope who wears the pants! They stayed over for a few days. Watching their rapid movements and sharp turns to the right or left was most enjoyable.

I suspect having seen a Whiterumped or Bonapart's Sandpiper. I cannot say I saw the white rump to satisfaction but the size and shortness of its bill suggests this bird. I've kept it on my suspect list.

Among the gulls, the Brownheaded have departed quite some time back. A few Blackheaded Gulls in non breeding plumage drop in. Then there are some fifty Slenderbilled Gulls but I simply cannot make out any rosy tinge to their white feathers. Do one year old gulls breed? How long do they remain in their juvenile plumage?

As the lake started drying up, a large number of Cormorants put in an appearance (poor fish!). They roost on the banyans on the embankment close to my house and are joined for the night by Egrets....."

This interesting lake is unfortunately earmarked for filling in and the reclaimed area parcelled out for housing societies! Rednecked Phalaropes have been recorded here to the best of my knowledge, either together, or separately, by Dharmakumarsinhji and Shivraj-kumar. I've never come across one. The knot apparently is not uncommon along the Gulf of Kutch shore line but can be easily overlooked resembling as it does the more plentiful and active, sanderling. The Broadbilled Sandpiper is another shore bird to be looked for.

My Comments on My Own Comments! by Lavkumar Khacher.

In my notes on the Birds of Dodda Gubbi part 1 I have mentioned flocks of Brahminy Mynas squabbling among trees in the next compound. Actually these were Greyheaded Mynas.

In the July Newsletter Jasper Newsome had provided an explanation to his having possibly missed the mention of the Dhayal or Magpie Robin on account of its being very common there. Actually, it is I who missed the bird in the list of common species which he provided at the end of his delightful report on the Birds of Khatmandu Valley - he has listed it as the Robin Dayal. My apologies.

It seems that my jocularly referring to Indra Kumar Sharma as a male Chauvinist has been taken rather seriously by him, witness his note on the subject on page 10 of the July Newsletter. Actually he wrote me a very long letter on the subject and this has resulted in a series of communications between us and an invitation to me, which I intend to avail myself of, to join him on his excursions into the Rajasthan desert. Seriously speaking, male birds may be more hardy as is shown by the fact that in migrants in the Himalayas and true also of temperate regions, it is the male which arrives from warmer places to start staking out the territories. However, these very males also remain there after the younger birds and possibly the females have left. Yet, in the matter of over all expenditure of energy over the year, I should think the female has to give an equal amount in that she has to produce the eggs which must be a heavy drain on her physical resources. Where there is a dimorphism between the sexes, the colourful male does not as a rule exert himself in domestic chores to the same extent as the female does. While robust males will acquire the best territories, the success of raising the broods depends on healthy females. Where one sex exerts more, the other does so elsewhere and it is the combined efficiency of both the parents which results in the successful survival of the species. Perhaps we could go on arguing for ever on this subject, and least of all would I like to pose as a expert in biodynamics of birds for I can claim no such expertise to my credit having by and large looked at birds for their beauty and for the great pleasure they have afforded me.

And finally, in reference to crows. The House Crow never occurred at Manali, Himachal Pradesh. This summer, Shantibhai Varu from Kutch who was there for the World Wildlife Fund - India camp reported seeing five of them. Of course Carrion Crows (or are they the Himalayan Jungle Crows?) are very much there. These last are magnificent soarers and seem to thoroughly enjoy riding the updrafts up mountain sides.

At this time of the year, July, there is a considerable amount of commotion through out the day in my backyard where a flock of Baya Weavers have appropriated various trees for building their nest. Right now there is a great hush prevailing with only very subdued ke,ke,ke, kes sounding. I went had had a look to see what was happening and found a young Shikra with heavy streaks on his

breast feeding on a freshly killed Baya---there, he has just left as I can hear the Bayas uttering a chip, chip, chip, chip, and the merry calls have once again started.

Miscellaneous Notes by M.H. Himmatsinhji.

About the duck described by Dr. Dutta in the Newsletter Vol.XIX No.3, from the description given, the duck concerned was most probably the Lesser Whistling Teal - *Dendrocygna javanica* - which has a fairly wide distribution in our country. I wonder which edition of the Book of Indian Birds Dr. Dutta has in his possession, but this Whistling Teal is described on page 132 of the 10th Edition of the B.I.B.

Reading about Koels in the Newsletter, I may mention that I normally hear about 3 of them in my compound in Bhuj. At present the breeding season for the House Crow is in full swing and most of them are sitting on eggs. They start their nest-building activities in May. At the peak of the season the number of Koels in my grounds was : about 6 females and 10 males, all estimated from their calls heard in early mornings and late evenings. At present there are about 3 female and 5 to 6 male Koels still left.

I have noticed that the House Crow starts its breeding activities in Bombay from about April onwards and I have seen the young leaving the nests and being fed by their parents by the time the rains break, or just before the onset of the monsoon. It would be interesting to find out from readers of the Newsletter living in various parts of India as to by what time the House Crow starts breeding and rearing its young in the respective parts of the country. This information would be very useful in determining as to what extent the breeding and rearing of the young of this bird is dependent on rainfall and whether they breed early in heavy rainfall areas. The House Crow is one of our commonest birds and this aspect of its behaviour would not be difficult to study.

On Gingee and Haflong by Peter Jackson

The June Newsletter has just arrived and two articles interested me particularly. The piece on Birdwatching in Gingee did not mention that it is the type locality for two well-known Indian birds. Only one of them is mentioned in the article - the White Scavenger Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus ginginianus*). Mr Koneri Rao and Mr. Rajan ought to have seen the Bank Mynah (*Acridotheres ginginianus*) too. Originally they were each put in a different genus - Vultur and Turdus - by Latham in 1790.

It was really good to read a first-hand account of the Haflong bird phenomenon, Mr Theodore Baskaran is wrong, however, in suggesting that it is unique. Dr Elliot McClure reported in his *Migration and Survival of the Birds of Asia* (1974) that such phenomena occur at Fraser's Hill in Malaysia and Dalton's Pass in Luzon (Philippines). Dr McClure says that for centuries the Igorot people of northern Luzon have practiced what they call "Pangkikan" or "sharing with the Gods". They set up lights - pressure lanterns and reflectors, nowadays - on ridges on foggy moonless nights and conduct a methodical harvest. It is interesting that the Hooded Pitta and the Ruddy Kingfisher were caught at Fraser's Hill and Dalton's Pass as well as at Jatinga.

I believe that similar things happen in Taiwan, but I cannot find the reference. As far as other parts of the world are concerned I have no knowledge, but there seems no reason why there should not be such phenomena.

Notes from Madras by V. Santharam.

Many thanks for publishing my article in the July issue. But going through it, I found two mistakes. One, you have omitted a note but given the sub-title of the same in the next note. You had given the title, "Reaction of Wagtails on seeing a Shikra" but published the contents of the following note entitled "Display of Redwinged Bushlark". (P 5). Two, on page 6, you omitted a sentence under the note "Crows feeding on Newspaper". The original sentence should have been "I did not find anything edible on the piece. I tried an experiment by putting on the gate another piece of newspaper, after dipping in the water...."

Recently we located a nest of the stone curlew at Adyar estuary and Mr. M. Krishnan came to the estuary and has taken some pictures of the birds at the nest. But when I went to the locality on Monday, I found that the eggs were missing. Probably some of the local people had located it and removed the eggs. I have had the luck of locating many other nests at the estuary this time. There were 4 nests of Black-bellied finch larks, 2 nests of Redwinged Bushlarks, 6-7 nests of Yellow-wattled Lapwings besides a number of nests of Green Bee-eaters. I shall, as soon as the breeding of birds is over, send a report on nests including some nesting behaviour of the stone curlew, to the "Newsletter".

I read Shri. Lavkumar Khacher's comments on my note regarding Mynas feeding on young garden lizards (February 1979). I was a bit surprised when I read that he had seen Redvented Bulbuls feeding on these reptiles. So imagine my surprise when I was told by my parents, one day, quite recently, that they had observed a house sparrow feeding on a young garden lizard in our garden.

On 17th June, I had been to the Guindy Deer Park for attending a meeting of "Madras Naturalists Society", a recently formed association by some of us who are interested in wildlife and nature. There are some trees on one side of the entrance and a wall to the other. Here I saw a young Common Hawk-Cuckoo or Brainfever (*Cuculus varius*) on the ground beneath a tree. It flew when I approached it and disappeared behind some shrubs. It was almost the size of the adult bird and seems to have ventured out of the nest some days back.

Just 40-50 yards away, I saw another young Brainfever bird, perched on the wall. It was not as shy as the other bird and let me watch it within 5-6 feet. Then it flew slowly with deliberate flapping of wings and settled on another part of the wall, a few yards away.

As it was too early for the visitors, I was able to see the two young birds for sometime, when one of them would fly to the ground and hunt for some insects or so.

I would like to know if young Brainfever Birds move closely or if it was because 2 eggs were laid in a Babbler's nest (which are supposed to be the main choice of the Cuckoos), though Cuckoos are supposed to lay only one egg per nest.

Shri. Khacher has very kindly made the following comments :

Comments : I'm not sure two cuckoo chicks could survive in one nest. This can only be confirmed by direct observation. More likely the two young cuckoos were raised in separate Babbler nests and had grown up as neighbours-

Lavkumar Khacher.

I would be glad if any readers could throw more light regarding this matter.

Incidentally, we have a village called Manali near Madras, which happens to be a very enchanting spot. There is a 'jheel' there with a grove on the eastern banks. The 'jheel' is the haunt of hundreds of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Indian Moorhens, Coots,

Cattle Egrets, Spotted Sandpipers, Yellow Wagtails, Dabchicks and a variety of other species. Once we managed to see a lone Purple Heron, landing majestically and having landed merging against the reeds and aquatic vegetation perfectly.

A favourite haunt of mine for birdwatching is the Adyar Estuary. As this place is quite near to my house I go there very often. The northern bank happens to be an open field (now slowly being swallowed by a housing colony) and the southern forming the estate of the Theosophical Society's world headquarters, is a thickly wooded area. As a result of the rare combination of various habitats, we have a large number of birds visiting this place. Watching birds here, on my own for the past one year or so, I have been able to record over a hundred and twenty species. This includes Avocets, Flamingoes, Godwits, many species of waders, wagtails, a species of Frigate Bird (probably a female magnificent Frigate Bird) and many more. This summer I am having a lot of nests to watch. I have seen nests of Blackbellied Finch Lark, Redwinged Bushlark, Yellow Wattled Lapwing, Bee-eater, and above all, a nest of the elusive Stone Curlew. The two eggs laid on bare ground were seen on 8th July and I am keeping a watch on them.

A new dimension to bird watching by E.R.C. Davidar

I am a watcher of animals. I spend a lot of time on machans and in hides waiting for them and when they show up watch and photograph them without being seen. The more closely I observe wild animals the more they strike me as individuals, each with a personality of its own. Individual quirks of character is more easily discernible in domestic animals and domesticated wild animals. For instance, no two elephants, particularly bulls, in an elephant camp behave in the same manner. Predators are even more individualistic in their behaviour.

Why should not each bird be a character in its own right? Many domestic birds stand out as individuals. I have enough material on some of the cockerels and turkeys we have had to fill a book. Recently, my son brought home from college a female roseringed parakeet. It was a thoroughly spoilt bird and a crusty character, which hated the world and Raju our servant boy in particular. Whenever Raju approached Polly it would fly at him shrieking fury. Its pupils would narrow down to pin points and its whole manner would change. If parakeets could breathe fire, Polly would have breathed fire and brimstone. In human terms Polly was a virago, if ever there was one.

In the wild too I have watched some birds whose behaviour could not be typecast. A couple of peacocks, some jungle cocks, two Indian robins, a blackheaded mynah, a baybacked shrike, and some crows, of

course which when watched closely had distinct personalities of their own and stood out from the rest of the species. Many so called human characteristics could be attributed to them also. Some were bold, a few cocky, some proved to be cowardly, and one was an out and out bully.

For this kind of bird watching besides a pair of field glasses, a notebook and other paraphrenalia of a bird watcher an alert mind, an observant eye and a sense of humour would be useful accessories.

If birds could be watched as individuals, bird watching could be a much more enriching experience. Then one need not go tramping all over the countryside to gain glimpses of an assortment of birds. The bird watcher can sit at home and indulge in his or her favourite pastime.

Next time the confiding sparrow or the cheeky crow comes along watch him closely he will prove to be a character and a never ending source of enjoyment and fun and you would have added a new dimension to your pastime.

A romantic roseringed parakeet by Kishor K. Gohil

Today I watched a roseringed parakeet behave in a way which seemed rather funny to me. Perched on a TV antenna he was engaged in what I believe goes for love-making acts of the specie. He repeatedly lifted one foot, threw back his head, then leaned forward and "kissed". Then he took a little jump, apparently in the act of mounting! I was intrigued and amused for the simple reason that the female was missing on the antenna and all that he did was mono-acting! He was perched on one of the parallel rods and it was the joint with the main bar of antenna which he "kissed" repeatedly. He jumped on the joint, took two steps, turned back and looked intently at the joint for some time and finally flew away.

I have seen peacocks displaying in absence of any female. But this parakeet seemed to be stretching it too far! It would be interesting to know if other birdwatchers have come across similar behaviour.

About Koel population - there are quite a few roosting on trees in the area where I live. I can hear at least six of them from near and far, taking part in their early morning ritual of contact-call-relay. But if only the Ku-hoo Ku-hoo of the male is to be considered, there are at least two males around. Of course there are more within the city limits - Rajkot can still boast of a few pockets of old properties having open spaces and huge trees, which must have been

planted before 40 years when this was developed as a residential area. I often marvel at the list of birds I have been able to see without leaving my own compound. It has gradually added up to 30 species - birds in our little garden, birds on a few magnificent trees within sight and birds flying overhead across the sky. Our area is now almost in the middle of the city but the birds do not seem to mind humans, buildings, heavy traffic and everything that goes with it, as long as they have their trees and vegetation. However, with sky-rocketting prices of land, the "progress" is catching up - trees and open spaces are giving way to multi-storey apartments and shops! Who needs trees, flowers and birds in a growing city?

Waterhens by Ananta Mitra

In an old tank filled with water-hyacinth and bounded with thickets we had been observing some white-breasted waterhens (dahuk) (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) since 1968. Though located in a populated suburb of the City in Tollygunge Area, the birds were carrying on a peaceful existence. During the rains we could hear their rhythmic pleasant calls and could observe the small downy chicks running between the legs of their mothers.

But misfortune befell them in 1973. The old tank was taken over by the Calcutta Improvement Trust and filling up operation started for the construction of a park. The Waterhens were forced out of their shelter.

At the outset, the frightened birds took refuge in the thickets of a small garden in the neighbourhood. But the cover was too inadequate.

Across the road there is an antiquated mosque covering an area about two acres of land. This is Tipu Sultan Mosque. Its compound is surrounded with walls and railings. On its rear-side there is a semi-wild area terminating in a bushy bed of a dried-up tank.

Soon the hens got into these undergrowths. They secured some cover and protection but the life-cycle could not be carried on in this terrain. The garden was devoid of water which was a necessity for the birds. It was found that they started a kind of double-living through local migration. During some parts of the year we could find them living in the garden and moving within the thickets in search of food. At other times they were totally absent. After the aforesaid ouster, however, their pleasant calls were never heard at any season of the year.

Then in June and July 1978, there were heavy rains in the area. After many years, the dried up tank of the mosque gathered certain amount of water. On the early morning on 7.7.78 along with the rains, there came the familiar croaks and calls of the waterhens. For several weeks thereafter, we enjoyed the rhythmic deep calls at different times of day and night. With the close of the monsoon the bed of the tank gradually dried up. The bird's sojourn and their calls, too, came to an end.

From these phenomena, two conclusions may possibly be drawn:

- 1) In spite of persecutions, birds loathe to abandon their territories.
- 2) If some shelter is provided and sympathy shown, they can be rehabilitated with minimum effort.

Egrets and Cormorants by Indra Kumar Sharma

It is noteworthy that Egrets like many other water birds generally roost at a considerable distance away from their feeding areas such as tanks and pools although they remain near the feeding grounds for most of the day. About 200 Little Egrets and Cattle Egrets roost on a Peepal tree and a Neem tree at the Jodhpur Railway Station in the non breeding season, from July to February, and from March to June which is the breeding season, they roost on a tree in the Island of the Crocodile Pond at Jodhpur Zoo. The distance between the two sites is about 2.5 k.m. From April to June 1978 I observed about 120 nests in the Peepal tree. Perhaps this site is preferred because of the dense foliage of the tree which protects the Egrets against attack from crows and kites.

This year 45 Little Cormorants were observed roosting with the Egrets in the Neem tree at Jodhpur Zoo. Formerly they roosted in Jodhpur city on a large peepal tree which has now broken down.

The timings for roosting of the Egrets and the Cormorants are noteworthy. On April 10th the sun set was at 18-45 hours, and there were only 10 Egrets on the roosting tree. By 18-55 22 more Egrets arrived. At 19-00 hours 56 Egrets and 20 Cormorants arrived. By 19-05 38 Egrets and 25 Cormorants arrived. By 19-10-27 Egrets arrived and by 19-20 more Egrets arrived. The Egrets apparently can see well in dim light and I presume that the birds which are farthest away from the roosting site arrive later than the others. I also noted their departure timings in the morning. They started to leave the roost at 6-10 hours.

I noticed that more than 200 medium to large sized birds roost on a single Neem tree. The thin outlying branches of the tree obviously gave them protection against predators such as the cat, mongoose and monitor lizard. The birds which come first settle on the top branches

and then move to lower positions so as to provide space to the next lot of birds coming in. Egrets and Cormorants perched together and not separately species wise. The droppings of these birds resulted in the withering of the Hollyhock (*Althae rosea*) beneath the roosting tree.

Occurrence of otters in Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary by R.K. Bhatnagar and M. Raizada

Occurrence of otters *Lutra* sp. in the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, Rajasthan has not so far been reported in the check lists by Harsha Vardhan and by V.S. Saxena in his book on flora and fauna of the sanctuary. During recent visit to the sanctuary from 3rd to 7th March, 1979 I happen to observe 7 individuals feeding in middle portion of the lake. Their feeding was typical and characteristic of group hunting with a surprise. We did not observe any predation of any bird but it was quite close to some shovellers and pochards. These birds are scared by these and took to flight to resettle at a distance. We feel that otters too are competitors of fish in the sanctuary and this resource must be getting considerably depleted due to them. Already there are reports that sufficient food is not available and may be one of the reasons why a small number of migrants settle in the area. We feel that there is every likelihood of more otters establishing themselves in the sanctuary lakes. If this is true it would be a worthwhile study to ascertain something on their food intake rate and its relationship to concentration of piscivorous birds in those areas. One of us (R.K.B) has observed otters in Corbett National Park and feel that these mammals generally feed on fishes of subadult age group or on bigger fishes. Feeding on adult fish obviously reduces breeding pairs and hence there would be lesser fish population in succeeding seasons. In fact in many pisciculture areas otters have status of pest and need management. We would be interested to know if other birdwatchers have observed these and in what areas of the sanctuary as well in what seasons.

Feeding competitor of nestlings of Painted Stork by R.K. Bhatnagar and M. Raizada.

During a recent visit to Ghana Bird Sanctuary, Bharatpur from 3rd to 7th March, 1979, thrice I happened to observe large egrets as feeding competitors of nestlings of painted storks. During the period very few nestlings were observed in the sanctuary and if my count is not wrong it may be hardly 5 to 6. All the rest (roughly 50) were mature enough to feed themselves but used to emit feeding calls and often attract parents. But in two cases we observed that large egrets too used to perch on the same tree and wait for storks bringing food

for their nestlings, and from which these egrets used to pick from different sides as crows pick feed from a tray. We feel that this competition needs to be studied.

The Range of the Blackwinged Kite by Narayan Deb

With regard to the note by M.B. Krishna (Newsletter for Birdwatchers July 79) I have been a resident of Ootacamund, for over 3 1/2 years and live at the foot of Elk Hill (8090'), neighbouring Doddabetta. I have been up Elk Hill several times on birdwatching trips as elsewhere in the Nilgiris. On several occasions in the mid-year months I have come across this bird on the wing. The Blackwinged Kite I think is fairly common in these parts.

Crows Feeding on Newspapers by T.V. Jose

There is a possibility that the paper was wet with something eatable and not just water. If crows eat wet newspaper, it will not be difficult for us to see them eat the same elsewhere too as there is no scarcity either of crows or of wet newspapers! But that is what we do not see.

Tailor Birds on Papaya Leaves by T.V. Jose

That tailor birds roost regularly on the tip of papaya leaf stalk is so common in (at least at some parts of) Kerala, that I feel they prefer it to any other kind of roost. I have seen sun birds do the same but strangely not any other birds of the same size. Again, I have not seen any birds (including tailor birds and sun birds) using papaya leaf stalk as roost in Bombay. Does it mean that they have not yet stumbled upon this possibility?

Our contributors

Mr. Lalsinh Raol, 2/18, New Government Quarters, Exhibition Ground, Jamnagar 361 001.

Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, 14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360 004.

M.H. Himmatsinhji, Jubilee Ground, Bhuj, Kutch.

Mr. Peter Jackson, Haut Verger, 1171 Bougy-Villars, Switzerland.

Mr. V. Santharam, 10, Leith Castle South Street, Santhome, Madras 28.

Mr. E.R.C. Davidar, "Canowie", Connoor-643 101, Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu.

Mr. Kishor K. Gohil, 'Viral', 4, Jagnath Plot, Rajkot, 360 001.

Mr. Ananta Mitre, 6/1, Prince Anwar Shah Road, Calcutta 700 033.

Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagwati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur-342020.

Mr. R.K. Bhatnagar, Ornithologist, Entomology Division, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi 12.

Mr. M. Raizada, Entomology Division, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi 12.

Mr. Narayan Deb, The Blue Mountains School, Ootacamund 643001, Tamil Nadu.

Shri. T.V. Jose, Flat No.34/671, MHB, New Siddharth Nagar, Goregaon (West), Bombay 400 062.

Subscriptions for 1979 have been received from:

U.P.: Mr. H.N. Mathur, Conservator of Forest, Environmental Research Station, New Forest, Dehra Dun 248006, Rs.15/-.

M.P.: Mr. Arvind Gupta, Vidushak Karkhana, Anuppur, Dist. Shahdol, Pin 484224, Rs.15/-.

A.P.: Mr. T. Sudhaker Rao, 1-9-295/32/5/B, Vidyanagar, Hyderabad, Rs.10/-.

Bihar : Mr. Pankaj Kumar, Probationary Officer, State Bank of India, J.C. Road, Patna, Bihar, Rs.15/-

Darjeeling : The Head Master, Victoria Boy's School, Kurseong, P.O. Dow Hill, District, Darjeeling, Pin 734204, Rs.15/-

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 9 SEPTEMBER, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XIX No. 9

September 1979

Contents

Bird news from Madras, by V. Santharam.

Birdwatchers at Atherampalley, by R. Sugathan.

"An analysis of unfriendly behaviour in a secluded bird community",
Another example of common mynas feeding on lizards, by A. Navarro S.J.

Correspondence

Regarding Comments by J.S. Serrao on Honeyguides by SR Shah.

The battle of bustards (Indian Express, communicated by Harkirat S. Sangha) .

Rose-coloured Starling in Norfolk by S.K. Reeves.

Bird on the Rocks (New Scientist, 1st March 1979, communicated by Mr. H.R. Krishna Murthy).

Otters in Bharatpur, by Ashok Kumar Sharma.

Miscellaneous Comments by V. Santharam.

Early arrivals by ZF.

Subscriptions

Bird news from Madras, by V. Santharam

The Frigate Bird

We were watching birds, resting on the banks of the Adyar river in the evening of October 11th. Soon my attention was on a bird, flying at a height of about hundred feet or so above the river. It approached us, gliding slowly. The bird was about the size of the common pariah kite, but had longer pointed wings. It had a white breast patch and the rest of the underparts were blackish. I also noticed the deeply forked ("swallow" tail).

Then I remembered what Shri. T. Koneri Rao had written to me. He had said in his letter that as he was waiting for conveyance on 25th September at 5.30 p.m. at Parry's Corner (a busy part of the city, close to harbour) he saw a bird being harassed by the kites. Yet the bird seemed to prefer their company. It would escape the attacks of the kites by a slight tilting movement of its wings. The description given by him fitted mine. He thinks it could have been a female magnificent frigate bird (*Fregata magnificens*). He also told me on a later date that the bird had probably come to roost on the buildings.

I had written to Dr. Salim Ali on the matter. He was kind enough to reply promptly and said in his letter that the bird we had seen certainly seemed to be a frigate bird, but what species it was difficult to confirm. He suggested that I check with the species dealt in Volume I of 'Handbook'. But we think none of them fit this rare vagrant.

Large Egret

I had the opportunity of meeting this bird, a solo, amidst a flock of about fifty cattle and little egrets at the Adyar River on 12th November. It was quite conspicuous among its cousins owing to its larger size and yellow beak. The large egret (*Egretta alba*) did not feed like the others. The feeding habits reminded me of the feeding habits of the grey heron. I had never seen this bird here before, though the other two are quite common. I have not been able to see this bird again.

Brown Shrike

Shrikes are quite rare at Adyar estuary and other places inside the city. So the Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) that we saw on that afternoon of 23rd September was very welcome. I was lucky to have Koneri Rao with me as he was able to identify the species even before I opened my field guide. It was only a few feet away from us and we could notice its features including

the dark eye-band and hooked bill clearly. The tail was bobbing up and down leisurely. The bird was, quite surprisingly, ignorant of our presence. It was not wary on this occasion, as mentioned in the books, though on other occasions, it never let me watch as close as this. I thought I might never see this migratory shrike which was only a passage migrant. But I was lucky to see it again on 15th and 20th of October. On the 20th, I am sure I saw two birds. After this they disappeared from the locality. On 7th January, I saw a brown shrike near Vedanthangal, about 50 miles south of the city.

Phalarope

I was one of the eight members of the 'Madras Naturalists Society' who went on an outing to the swamps just outside the city on 30th October. As we were watching some teals and other birds on the roadside swamps, Koneri Rao pointed out a bird in the shallow waters on the other side of the Road. Very soon, the bird was identified as the red necked phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). It was either swimming or wading in the water. It was around seven inches in length with a black bill, black, grey and white upper parts, a black line through the eye and whitish under parts. It was in its winter plumage. Though we were watching it from a very near position, the bird did not seem to mind our presence at all. One of our members even photographed it from within ten feet! It was probably a passage migrant.

Jacanas

On 31st October, myself and Shri. V.J. Rajan had been to a place called Manali, north of Madras, to see new birds, if we could find any. We came across a lake covered with reeds, lily plants, etc. We discussed how appropriate a habitat it was for Jacanas and other water birds. Even as we were talking about them, we saw a bird flying out from the middle of the 'Jheel'. It had white wings and we could have easily mistaken it for a pond heron, which were quite common around the lake. But as it landed we could make out that it was a pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), in non-breeding plumage. As the plumage matched with perfection the surroundings, it was difficult to spot the birds. But they often flew revealing their presence. One or two birds were even found to be in breeding plumage.

I returned to the place with two other friends on the morning of 18th November and we again saw more of them. There were at least some 30-40 birds and they were noisy, unlike the previous occasion. The whole place was filled with their calls which were like the mewing of cats uttered in a nasal tone. Some local people told

us that the Jacanas bred in that jheel and also described the floating nests of the birds. There were, even on this visit, birds to be seen in breeding dress.

Grey Drongo

After enjoying the birds of the jheel, we moved to a nearby grove. We encountered many birds including minivets, ioras, golden oriole, black-headed cuckoo-shrike, and several more. Above all, we saw a drongo on a palm tree, perched on a branch, in the middle of the grove. We could clearly see that the underparts were ashy grey and not black as in case of the black drongo. Because of the habitat and colouration, we think it was a grey drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*). The size was about that of the black drongo. I don't know whether the bird has been recorded around Madras. The field guides also do not give precise information, regarding the occurrence of this bird around this area. I would, therefore, like to know from experienced readers further details regarding the bird's distribution.

Flamingoes

I consider November 17th as one of my luckiest days for it was on that morning I had been able to see three flamingoes (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) at Adyar estuary. They were flying at a low height of about 35-40 feet, practically right above, our heads. We had been watching some cattle egrets on the lawns of Chettinad Place, when someone shouted asking us to look above. And then we saw them: rose coloured long necked birds, with scarlet and black on wings and the long legs trailing behind. We were surprised and could not believe our eyes at first. Flamingoes are very rare visitors to the estuary and only once, five or six years back, a bird had been recorded. As the birds were flying at a low height, I think they had been feeding at the river.

Again on 9th December, we saw eight more flamingoes, again in flight. They were now flying towards the river and when they reached it, they changed their course and flew up the river. May be they landed somewhere up the river. I hope to see more of them in the near future.

Avocets

After the heavy rains for six days, the sun was back on the clear blue sky on 31-12-78. I spent three delightful hours at the estuary that afternoon. The tide was out and hence very little water. The sandbars with squelchy mud were well above the water-level. Here I saw my first avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) resting on one leg, occasionally bobbing its head. Then three more birds appeared and joined it and all fed together. Often they were disturbed by crows and so were seen often in flight. By 5.30 p.m. I noticed three birds taking a bath in the little stream of water that flowed nearby. I saw two or three of them again on 1-1-1979. After this, despite careful search, I never found them again.

Avocets have been recorded only once, to my knowledge, about two years back. I think they are passage migrants.

Birdwatching at Atherampalley, by R. Sugathan

An insect hunting party consisting of the grey tit (*Parus major*) the common iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), the whitebellied blue flycatcher (*Pericrocotus flammeus flammeus*), the blackheaded cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina melanoptera*), the southern bronzed drongo (*Chaptia aenea malayensis*) and the racket-tailed drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) were hunting in a teak plantation. It was on 10th of June 1979 and the time was at about 7.30 a.m. at a place called Atherampalley on the foot hills of Western Ghats.

The racket-tailed drongo was leading the party. They were two in number and were very actively calling and imitating almost all the calls of other birds, particularly of the hunting party. A pair of blackheaded cuckoo-shrikes with a fledgling were on the same teak tree on which the drongo's were sitting. The grey tits were busily engaged in collecting insects from the tree. A common iora was active among the newly sprouting leaves of the teak. As usual, a pied flycatcher shrike was watching for insect movements sitting on a dead branch. Orange minivets were few in number and most of them were hidden among the green foliage except a few which came out during the hunt. The white bellied blue flycatcher was occupying a lower area among the hunting party.

Now the cuckoo-shrike flew away from the tree and the fledgling was alone on the branch. One of the racket-tailed drongo's were seated very close to the cuckoo-shrike young one. Within 3 minutes one of the cuckoo-shrikes came with some insects and fed the young one and flew away. After about five minutes again it came, fed the young one and fled away. In between, the racket-tailed drongo changed its perch, took some insects and came back to another branch of the same tree. This branch was a little higher up from the branch on which the cuckoo-shrike young was sitting. Suddenly the racket-tailed drongo took a deep glide and with a grasshopper it came back to the same branch on which the young cuckoo-shrike was sitting.

The drongo was about 2 feet away from the cuckoo-shrike and was trying to kill the insect. Slowly the cuckoo-shrike moved towards the drongo gaping for food. When it was very close to the drongo it fed the young one with the insect. Then both of them were sitting like that for about 2 minutes. I was thrilled to observe the drongo feeding the young cuckoo-shrike. Then the drongo changed its place allowing its parent to feed the young. Now the party was advancing under the leadership of the other racket-tailed drongo. He was not at all interested

in the cuckoo-shrike young one or any other birds in the party. But at times it was seen chatting with the other racket-tailed drongo, some times very angry and sometimes very social.

By now the part had advanced to about 30 to 40 feet from the first place. I was observing them for the last 35 minutes. Within the next 53 minutes of observation the same racket-tailed drongo fed the cuckoo-shrike young three times. During this time the party covered a distance of about 2,000 feet from the first place.

During my observation period only one bird apart from its parents was seen attending the cuckoo-shrike young one. It was very friendly with the young bird and at times it was seen chatting with it. But the young bird was silent and I think was a little afraid of the racket-tailed drongo's presence. Towards the end of my observations one bird of prey flew through the forest very close to the hunting party. Then some of the birds produced alarm calls including the racket-tailed drongo which was feeding the young bird.

I could not observe them further because it started raining. So next day I came back to the same area but could not see the hunting party anywhere around the place. Another party of redwhiskered bulbuls (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) were occupying this area.

"An analysis of unfriendly behaviour in a secluded bird community!"
Another example of common mynas feeding on lizards, by A. Navarro S.J.

With reference to the statement of Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma about his observation on the common myna feeding on lizards published in this paper last February 1979 I would like to point out my own experiences on the same subject.

In May 1978, I spent my holidays birdwatching and taping bird songs in Bhutan. We stayed in the public school in Punakha. The second day after our arrival as I was surveying the school grounds and neighbouring surroundings. I noticed a large contingent of the three most common species, the common myna, the common sparrow and the common crow. I was trying to find the relationship between these three species within the school compound, since it was the second largest building in Punakha and the most modern settlement finished in the year 1977 with 270 inhabitants that is 240 students and 20 staff members.

There were two main reasons I could account for the birds attachment to the school. (1) the large population within the settlement and (2) their natural social habits and behaviour, though it appears as if the birds considered man and man's haunts as part of their environment. Since then anyhow, history repeats itself that as man invades new territories, the three common species follow man's trails and explorations.

I do not doubt that their association is totally environmental. Though in my observations, I did notice an unfriendly attitude among themselves, such behaviour could be due to part or total failure of some of the components of the basic environment. The whole problem was mainly the lack of food in proportion to the number of birds. A further observation proved that to be a source of their hostile behaviour.

Three times we came across the remains of common sparrows killed and eaten by some predator. The students held the crows responsible for such incidents. The mynas and the crows were constantly quarrelling.

There was a time when I noticed mynas carrying a small thin lizard about four inches in length. Once I witnessed a struggle between some mynas and crows for the possession of a large lizard. I was surprised to see the myna getting most of the lizard. Occasionally, I saw a few jungle crows flying over the school campus. I considered them to be passers-by since they never came down to the ground.

Later in my daily rounds, I often saw these little lizards among the bushes. These lizards are known as the Bhutan garden lizards.

Correspondence

Regarding Comments by J.S. Serrao on Honeyguides by SP

"The mystery of these snow white combs was solved a day later" means on 27th I met Shri. S.A. Hussain at U.F. and he solved the mystery. i.e. he gave me the details of his research on honeyguides in Bhutan.

Had I seen the wasps attacking, I would not have called it a mystery. Possibly the interesting explanation by Shri. Hussain made me use the word mystery.

Regarding sex, it is based on the observation that the two never changed their perches and none of the five came to perch on that pole, whereas the five used to change their perches, the two never did so. I made not an emphatic statement but only said "we felt as if the perch on the bamboo was reserved for the two guys". The word "we" is used as there were three other birdwatchers.

The battle of bustards (Indian Express, communicated by Harkirat S. Sangha)

The Indian Government is strengthening relations with the Arab countries by sacrificing rare bustards (Jailur) in Rajasthan. Since last few years, Arab Sheikhs and princes have been granted permission for falconry.

Large groups as many as hundred with their camp equipment cross over from Pakistan. Recently number of applications has risen but number

of bustards and other game birds that their falcons attack in flight has dwindled down.

There has been some protest among the government circles against this. But by far the most serious objection has come from the Rajasthan's Chief Minister because Jain sentiments in some areas resent it.

Sadly a decision has been taken to allow a prince from UAE to hunt. What is now feared is that when UAE has been allowed others would too be.

Rose-coloured Starling in Norfolk by S.K. Reeves.

What nostalgic memories were re-called for me when, on a cold, wet day on the 21st May last, I saw, for a matter of a few seconds only, a Rose-coloured Starling (*Sturnus roseus*) feeding on an area of short, green turf in company with a small party of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

This was on Salthouse Heath on the North Norfolk coast.

The bird had been seen two or three days previously and continued for another week or so. I was unfortunate, however, in not being able to see it again.

The Rose-coloured Starling, alias Rosy Starling or Rosy Pastor, is a southern central Palearctic species, and a scarce visitor to this country. It winters mainly in the N.W. corner of India. It has been seen in Norfolk less than twenty times.

How vividly I can remember the birds in winter, swarming in hundreds on the Pilwa trees in our compound, in the Kaira District of Gujarat, and feeding voraciously on the small pink berries.

Bird on the Rocks (New Scientist, 1st March 1979, communicated by Mr. H.R. Krishna Murthy)

"A new species of bird with remarkable nesting habits has been discovered in the Ankober highlands of Ethiopia by Dr. John Ash, then working at the US Naval Medical Research Unit at Addis Ababa. Ash plucked out the bird as an undescribed species of Canary, although it is very similar in appearance to other well-known varieties, and he confirmed his find by collecting two specimens which are now in the US National Museum of Natural History in Washington.

In a follow-up visit he found a nest and eggs of the species sited at the end of a small vertical tunnel in the overhang of a cliff. This is an unusual choice of venue for canaries and serious, which normally nest in vegetation. Ash considers that the nearest relative to the new canary-named-*Serinus ankoberensis* - is *S. menaehensis*, which also nests in holes. The nest contained a flea - *Aphropsylla* spp - which is also a new and as yet undescribed species".

Otters in Bharatpur, by Ashok Kumar Sharma

I was surprised to read in the note by R.K. Bhatnagar & M Raizada that Otters *Lutra* sp. have not been reported by V.S. Saxena in his A study of Flora & Fauna of Bharatpur bird sanctuary. Smooth Indian Otter

On page 5, I read Mr. Peter Jackson's comments on the article by Shri. T. Koneri Rao on Gingee. Mr. Jackson has mentioned that the author has missed the Bank Myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*) at Gingee. But on referring to the "Popular Handbook of Indian Birds" by Whistler, I found that the Bank Myna's distribution is restricted to "the plains of Northern and Central India". Dr. Salim Ali in "The Book of Indian Birds (10th Edition) writes : "Sind in Pakistan and the greater part of northern India, east to Bangladesh, south to about the latitude of Bombay.

But Gingee is situated farther down, south of this range in Tamil Nadu. It is about 150 kms from Madras on the Madras-Tiruvannamalai route. Probably the specific name 'ginginianus' has misled Mr. Peter Jackson.

Regarding M.K. Himmatsinhji's Note : Though the house crows are seen nesting almost throughout the year in Madras, they seem to have a "peak" season in the months of May-September. I have been noticing plenty of nests during this period. There are at least a dozen active nests in the neighbourhood of our house at present (in mid-August) and almost all the house crows now seem to be busy collecting materials for building nests. I also see a fledgeling of house crow, moving in our garden with drooped wings and the parent birds come and feed it with tit-bits.

In this part of the country, we normally have rains between September-December, with the maximum rains in October-November, when the N.E. Monsoon is active. So as Shri M.K. Himmatsinhji has suggested, there seems to be some relation between the breeding of crows and rains.

On 15th August, I had been to the estate of the Theosophical Society and was happy to see besides a number of birds, a family of the Golden-backed Woodpeckers on a coconut palm. They were very noisy. The family consisted of the parent birds and 2-3 immature birds. (As they were too active, I could not determine the exact number). One of the birds was perched on a coconut fruit and was seen feeding on it pecking at the inner parts. It was very voracious and didn't tolerate the presence of other members of its own family. It also attacked a palm squirrel which was trying to get something out of the coconut. There are a number of large crabs which are supposed to bore holes on the fruit for the soft flesh and it looks as though this coconut was also opened by the crabs. The adjacent coconut also had a hole on the top. Sometimes the woodpecker itself was pecking at the outer parts of the fruit. Though this bird has been seen feeding on ripe fruits and nectar, I don't know whether coconut has been listed on its menu.

Could any readers verify and throw more light on this matter?

Early arrivals by ZF

On the morning of the 18th August while riding past Dodda Gubbi lake I heard the pleasant tew-tew calls of a couple of Green Shanks. I presume that they must be one of the first birds to arrive this season. The first Swallows I saw were on the 19th of August.

Our Contributors

Mr. V. Santharam, 10, Leith Castle South Street, Santhome, Madras 28.
 Mr. R. Sugathan, 103, Petersburg, Coonoor 643101, Tamil Nadu.
 Mr. A. Navarro S.J., St. Xaviers High School, Bombay 1.
 Mr. Sumant R. Shah, A-20, Shaktisadan, Lamington Road, Bombay 400 007.
 Mr. Harkirat S. Sangha, c/o. City Supt. of Police, Kotwali, Jaipur - 302 001.
 Mr. S.K. Reeves, 6, Town Close, Holt, Norfolk, England.
 Mr. H.R. Krishna Murthy, Science Officer, AIR Bangalore, Bangalore.
 Mr. Ashok Kumar Sharma, 54, Avinash Path, Dhuleshwar Garden, Jaipur - 302001.

Subscriptions for 1979 have been received from:

Maharashtra : Mr. D.B. Pawar, Senior Research Assistant, Department of Entomology, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri 413722, Ahmednagar, Rs.15/-;

Rajasthan: Dr. K.V. Rama Rao, Superintending Zoologist, Officer-in-Charge, Desert Regional Station, Zoological Survey of India, Paota 'B' Road, Patodi House, Jodhpur, Rs.15;

New Delhi: Mr. R. Srinivasan, D II/6, Pandara Road, New Delhi 110 003, Rs.15/-;

Karnataka : Capt. S. Prabhala, Deputy General Manager, BEL, D&E(Radar), Bangalore 560 013, Rs.15/-; Mr. Kumar Ghorpade, Dodda Gubbi P.O., Via Vidyanagar, Bangalore 562134.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 10 OCTOBER, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

Vol. XIX No. 90

October 1979

Contents

Birding in and around Kodaikanal (Ca. May 15-June 15) by T.V. Narayana.

Corbett National Park in October by Y.M. Rai.

Birds at Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, Bhopal Township, by K.K. Mandalaywala.

Correspondence

Swans in the Stratosphere, by Peter Jackson.

The Haflong Phenomenon by ZF.

- a) Breeding Season of House Crow ,
- b) Auto-eroticism in the Roseringed Parakeet, and
- c) House Crows Attacking Laggar Falcon and Short-toed Eagle, by
Indra Kumar Sharma.

Subscriptions

Birding in and around Kodaikanal (Ca. May 15 - June 15) by T.V. Narayana

Pride of place in any discussion of Kodaikanal birds must be given to the Palni white-breasted laughing-thrush. It is remarkable that a laughing thrush has become so 'tame and confiding' (Salim Ali) whereas the laughing thrushes in general are great skulkers, difficult to observe and are also scarce due to destruction of their habitat. The Palni laughing thrush can easily be seen even in the gardens of Kodi, sporting a white breast and rufous underparts. But it is the white eyebrows outlined by black lines that render him conspicuous, giving a small flock the air of a group of old but jaunty professors, with slaty brown caps not fully covering their white locks which protrude on either side of their heads. If the Tamil Nadu Government creates a national park in the still magnificent Palni hills, it would be most appropriate to choose this laughing thrush as its symbol; in my own mind it is already 'The Kodi Bird'.

An amusing incident involving the Kodi bird is perhaps worth recounting. In the centre of town, when I was about 100 feet or so from Spencers, I noticed two young ladies at the gate of Spencers apparently watching a small flock of birds in the opposite compound. What made it difficult to decide whether they were birding or not, was that they did not have a pair of binoculars! Intrigued by such evident devotion to birding, sans binoculars, I mentally noted that the birds involved were my Kodi birds and sauntered along very slowly until I passed them. The young ladies called me and requested me to identify the birds they saw; much to my astonishment, I had forgotten the correct name of my Kodi bird and replied it was one of the common species, a bulbul or a babbler. While they agreed it was common, they were certain it was neither a babbler nor a bulbul. So if Gowri and Sita are reading this column, they should know what the bird was. I have also left my binoculars in Kodi which can be borrowed by enthusiastic birders by just contacting me.

The commonest bird in Kodi and one which attracts attention to itself with its occasional loud screeches is the jungle myna. While it is true house crows and domestic sparrows are not established in Kodi as they are - alas - in the rest of India, I have seen two small flocks of the unmentionable sparrow totalling 7 to 8 individuals. Reliable observers have informed me of the house crow's presence this summer near the reservoir and occasionally flying across the lake. It is possible that the jungle myna, by occupying some of the suitable niches of the sparrow, prevents it from breeding prolifically in Kodi; it is puzzling however, that the house crow was nearly **absent** throughout my stay, while the jungle crow was nearly always present during my walks in and around town. The house crow is present and 'abundantly' visible at Oothu halfway down the ghat

road. Kodi represents the unique place in India where human habitation and the house crow do not go together!

A morning stroll on Coaker's walk reveals many common birds, including the red-whiskered and redvented bulbuls which seem so well adapted to lantana, that scourage of India's beautiful and wild places. Since Bryant Park with its trees is not far off, one usually sees and hears the black bulbul also during these walks. It has red legs and a red beak which it is possible to confuse with the orange bill of the black bird (yes, the same species but different race of the bird in the English nursery rhyme); the latter does not have a notched tail and is a bird found on or near the ground or in the lower branches of trees, while the black bulbul is a bird of the tree-tops.

If you can stop looking down at the magnificent vista beneath you at Coaker's walk and look up during your morning walk, you will usually notice swifts. The most abundant are the edible-nest swiftlets, recognised easily by their spells of fluttering like a bat between soaring in the usual way. They are also seen flying over the lake on a sunny day. Their regular presence suggests that they roost not far away and this was confirmed by some young friends interested in rock climbing, who reported to me that they nest (roost) in devil's kitchen. When we visited pillar rocks, we saw them fly in and out of the devil's kitchen itself; but not having ventured into the cave, I cannot say whether they nest there. A larger swift, with its unmistakable white belly, was seen clearly, but only once; this is *Apus Melba*, the Alpine swift. Another swift, the same size as the Alpine, the brown-throated spinetail was glimpsed, without binoculars, when this species was flying just above the hospital. The Nilgiri swallow, which has a remarkable distribution from Java to Tahiti in the Pacific (*Himundo Pacifica* or *Javanica*) can also be seen in various places in Kodi, including a pair once by the Packia Deepam Restaurant! The Nilgiri Pipit was also seen from Coaker's walk, with its pale rufous eyebrow and no conspicuous white in its tail. As Ali and Ripley point out, some individuals have their outer tail feathers buffish and not the usual white as in most pipits. The Kodi bird, the Nilgiri verditer flycatcher and this pipit are found only in S.W. India; so I was satisfied in having seen all three in town.

If it were not for its small size and very soft calls which render it inconspicuous, the Nilgiri white-eye would swamp all other species in the Palni hills. These greenish birds with yellow bibs and white 'spectacles' were found in most habitats - gardens, orchards, sholas with thick forest, etc. Among the sixty-odd white-eye species of the world, India has one, Ceylon a different one and Australia only two. But the small island of Lifu off New Caledonia in the Pacific has three species: (of which I was lucky to see two).

Far less abundant, but easily seen is the pied bush-chat which is dimorphic i.e. the female of the species is strikingly different from the male. While Ali notes that the rufous turtle dove occurs in the Palnis, the rather complete museum list of all birds of the Palnis lists only the Indian spotted dove and not the rufous turtle dove. I also missed in the excellent museum list the Nilgiri flower-pecker, again endemic to the region, a tiny bird distinguished by its black and not flesh-coloured bill. A comic character with a loud chip and rapidly fluttering wings to compensate for its size, he is most easily located by carefully examining the loranthus clump of trees. Indeed once the tree, in which he is, is located from his loud chip you can concentrate on a convenient loranthus clump and he is more likely than not to visit your clump. The Nilgiri verditer flycatcher, which is all blue with a white spot on the rump, and the rufous-backed shrike, a typical masked shrike sitting on telephone wires and other prominent spots, complete the list of small birds seen around town.

The large birds of prey I describe were actually seen most often in town, although the same eagles could and did turn up at much lower levels in the Palnis also. Throughout my stay I was delighted to see for fairly long periods and at close quarters the crested serpent-eagle (*Spilornis Cheela*). For even longer periods and practically every day I heard the ke-klee..... er of *Spilornis Cheela*, which is one of the great sounds of India. To me, it is as thrilling as the call of the African fish eagle (*C. Vocifer*) or even that of the Hadada ibis, which according to Williams, is one of the great sounds of Africa. It was an exhilarating experience to see three crested serpent-eagles simultaneously soaring above Kodi towards Perumal (Malai), and surely more Indians deserve to hear this call of freedom, which has unfortunately been muted in so many places. The serpent-eagles and crested honey-buzzards I encountered were often perched on trees in a wooded part of town, almost at the height of Kurunji Andavar temple. The eagles were also seen over the lake, just as the occasional black kite flew over the bazaar. The latter's notched tail clearly separates it from all other hawks and eagles.

The crested honey-buzzard is extremely variable and is difficult to identify at a casual glance. We located them (the 'we' includes two youngsters who admired my *Spilornis*) in a grove of conifers. While one flew around from tree to tree with a semicircular object of the size of a half pineapple slice (but looking like a bright chappati) clutched in its talons, and other alighted on a branch with a lizard in its beak. For 10 seconds or so they sat side by side on a branch and it was remarkable to see the differences between them - perhaps a mother and a young male. The older bird closely resembled the mounted honey buzzard in the museum at Shembaganur, and so my identification was complete. The curator described how, in the olden days when a lot more wild bees nested

around Kodi, it was not unusual to see a dozen of these magnificent birds in one day.

Part II consists of birding around Kodi, from the Coolie Ghat Road at Shembag and Tiger Shola, which are a few hundred metres below Kodi, to a plantation beside an original forest tract, nearly 1500 metres below. The lake at Kodi is at 2200 metres.

Corbett National Park in October by Y.M. Rai

The jungle dominated us in October (October is closed season for tourists to the park). The jungle always dominates. It is a great challenge to man. Hence man tried to destroy it utterly. October '78 was different in the Park. Landslides and devastation of roads were as unprecedented as the rain this year. So trekking had to be done for sixteen kilometres to reach Gairal Rest House for stay and observation of wild animals and birds.

At dawn one could only hear birds singing. There was the piercing sweet call of the Himalayan whistling thrush (*Myiophoneus c. temminckii*), the sweet song of the white-throated fantail flycatcher (*Rhipidura albicollis*) and a chorus of other birds. The birds were better seen when the morning sun began to dry the trees and the grasses of the heavy night dew. As the sun brightened the forest, the birds came feeding on insects, fruits or seeds. Wave after wave came and passed. In the plains the feeding activity does not have this mobility, as the sources of food are few.

It was interesting to note how the birds of the same sort moved in a company. In a flock of bar-winged or pied flycatcher shrike (*Hemipus picatus*) was the white-throated fantail flycatcher and some common wood shrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*). There was also a chestnut-headed bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*) who hunted with them but stayed on a tree. In the thick forest of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) the racket-tailed drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) dived for some insect from a high branch, trailing its long rackets while the beautiful male scarlet minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*) searched for food above, and the grey-capped woodpecker (*Picoides canicapillus*) actively scurried along the thin branches. A west-Himalayan small yellow-naped woodpecker (*Chloropus simlae*) came to join the company. Nearby there were some chestnut-bellied nuthatches (*Sitta castanea*). In the company of insectivorous birds at other place was seen the grey-headed flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*). Another lovely flycatcher seen was the Verditer flycatcher (*Muscicapa thalassina*).

The woodpeckers were most conspicuous at this time in the forest. In addition to those mentioned above, there were the golden-backed woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*), the Indian black-naped green woodpecker (*Picus canus*) and the little scaly-bellied green woodpecker (*Picus myrmecophoneus*). The bulbuls were many. The white-cheeked bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*) outnumbered the redvented bulbuls (*P. cafer*).

The blackcrested bulbul (*P. melanicterus*) did not seem gregarious. The ashy bulbul (*Hypsipetes flavala*) is a sweet songster. A small flock of them sat in a shrub and sang while I recorded their calls on tape approaching nearer. While still some ten feet away they noticed the human presence and their calls faded. It just needed a playback when out they came singing, shedding all fear.

This trick of playback did not succeed in case of the green magpie (*Cissa chinensis*). One green magpie descended a few tree tops on a hill and looked cautiously downward through the leaves, in response to a recorded call all the time. But it refused to come nearer probably because there was no carnivore at a feast.

In addition to the jungle babbler (*Turdoides striatus*), there was also the black-chinned babbler (*Stachyris pyrrhops*). The chorus of white-throated laughing thrush (*Garrulax leucolophus*) was a strange combination of musical notes and harsh screams. Moving on a forest road one day I was surprised to hear strange wailing screams as of the young pigs. They were lesser necklaced laughing thrush (*Garrulax monileger*) and the cause of alarm was a raptor. On a tree of *Ficus infectoria* every morning was seen the foolishly wise looking lineated barbet (*Megalaima lineata*) along with crimsonbreasted barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*). The beautiful blue throated barbet (*M. asiatica*) was also seen occasionally. Flocks of white-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosa*) came on the ficus tree every morning. There was also seen in the morning on the tree the common iora (*Aegithina tiphia*). The grey tit (*Parus major*) was the most common bird here for it was seen at all hours of the day and at times when no birds were around. The blackheaded oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*), as beautiful as the golden oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) here, is a dweller of thick green foliage, mostly calling from high tree tops.

In the late afternoons during a watch for mammals by the river side there was seen the white capped redstart (*Chaimarronias leucocephalus*) fanning its black edged tail. There was also a plumbeous redstart (*Rhyacornis fuliginosus*). How faded and unattractive its female is! These redstarts were seen on the pebbles at the river edge before the sun rose and they were there after the sun set. Towards the evening a pair of the Himalayan pied kingfishers (*Ceryle lugubris*) came flying and sat awhile on pebbles to enjoy a last look of the river Ramaganga before going to roost. The only sign of their day's adventure was the wet crest split in two distinct peaks, presenting a comical hooded look. Soon after came a brown headed storkbilled kingfisher (*Palargopsis capensis*) to roost on a tree on the opposite bank. A small blue kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) spent its whole day on the river bank on a stump. During the day about a dozen crested tree swifts (*Hemiproene coronata*) flew high above the river, mostly flourishing a pintail but often displaying a bifurcated tail.

The beautiful Himalayan yellow backed sunbird (*Aethopyga seheriaae*) commonly seen here in March could not be seen now in this month.

The mountain hawk-eagle or the feather-toed hawk eagle (*Spizaetus nipalensis*) is a powerful bird with a magnificent velvety black, white-tipped crest. It had a regal look which explained the choice by ancient Egyptians of the eagle as a royal symbol. The crested serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*), so often mentioned by Jim Corbett, was the bird no visitor to the Park could fail to notice. The white-eyed buzzard (*Butastur teesa*) sat on a dry branch of a tall tree over-looking the grassland. One evening, just before the sun went down, moving up a jungle road, I saw collared pygmy owlets (*Glaucidium brodiei*) on several trees.

Birdwatching can be a very exciting occupation in Corbett National Park.

Birds at Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, Bhopal Township, by K.K. Mandalaywala

Bhopal, capital of Madhya Pradesh, is situated at an altitude of about 1600 ft. amidst two beautiful lakes and hills all around and commands a grand scenery. To the east of the city, by the right side of State Highway, lies the factory and residential township of Bharat Heavy Electricals, one of the largest public undertakings in India manufacturing power electrical equipment.

The township, with well laid out roads and gardens, attracts many species of birds. Though the trees have been planted throughout the township on a large scale, many of these have yet to attain full growth. As there is still a big scope for planting more trees, Horticulture Division of the factory Town Administration Department, in coordination with BHEL Nature Club, is taking up tree plantation project this year on a grand scale.

There is a small lake situated inside the township, popularly known as "Anglers' Paradise", where one can see quite a few species of water birds (both resident and migratory). Pond Herons, Little Egrets, White-breasted Waterhens, Redwattled Lapwings are resident birds here, and are frequently seen throughout the year. Here, in this lake, on many occasions, I have seen Pied Kingfisher hover in the air at about 50 ft. above the water level and suddenly making a vertical dive into the water to catch the fish. One gets real thrill watching these kingfishers perform the above operation. Three more species of kingfishers namely the Common Kingfisher, the Whitebreasted Kingfisher, and the Brownheaded Storkbilled Kingfisher are also seen in the township. They have been seen perching either on the electric line or on the overhanging branch of the tree on the bank of the lake at different times.

One of the most conspicuous bird calls which can be heard in the township (even during night) is the loud and shrill call of Redwattled Lapwings. They seem to be abundant in the township, while its other cousin, Yellow-wattled Lapwings are totally absent from the township. (I Have seen these birds in plenty near Hathaikheda lake, which is just two kilometres away from the township. In this Hathaikheda lake, one can observe Little Cormorants and Indian Skimmer besides Sarus Cranes).

Among the raptors, Pariah Kites are quite commonly seen soaring in the air. Besides, I have also seen a single Blackwinged Kite many times inside the factory premises. In fact, it used to perch on one of the bare branches of the dead tree, overlooking the grassy waste land inside the factory. With the felling of its favourite tree, the bird has hardly been seen again. Shri. A.K. Gupta, one of our Dept. Production Managers, who is also a keen naturalist, has informed me that there used to be some Grey Partridges inside the factory premises two to three years back and he has occasionally heard their calls. Among the species of Vultures, Bengal Vultures and White Scavenger Vultures keep themselves occupied at the garbage dumps on the outskirts of the township.

Right in front of the offices of Town Administration Department, there are a few large Ficus trees. During my bird-watching trips in the township last year, I have often seen two to three Coppersmiths on one of these trees here, emitting the hammering sound.

With the approach of summer, one can hear the most beautiful call of the bird kingdom, that of male Koel. They become very active from March onwards and at dawn, their calls can be heard from all directions. During this period, Golden Orioles also become very active. The sight of Golden Oriole, which seems to be all cast in gold, is a treat to the eyes of the bird-watcher. I will never get tired of seeing this bird. Since last few days, I have been hearing its soft whistles from the tree behind my quarter, besides having the pleasure of observing it at close range.

Last year, just after the monsoon, one of the earliest arrivals among the winter migratory birds were the White Wagtails. The first White Wagtail was observed on 29th September in the township. These are then followed by Grey Wagtails and Large Pied Wagtails. Other migratory species that visit our township are Blackwinged Stilts, Little Ringed Plovers, Common Sandpipers, Redstarts, Collared Bushchats, Indian Pipits, Small Skylarks, and Crested Larks. The mixed parties of Wagtails, Larks and Pipits could be often seen feeding on the open ground by the side of the lake. Common Swallows can also be seen perching on the electric lines near the lake. From November till late March, a flock of about 15 to 20 Blackwinged Stilts were always seen wading on the muddy banks of the lake in the mornings and in the evenings. On one of the occasions, I had a chance of observing a single Bluethroat hopping on the marshy area near the lake. White-eyes, which are locally migratory, seem to visit the township

in the winter in large numbers. A group of about 20 to 25 birds can be seen flying from one tree to another.

Among the common species, Mynas, Warblers, Babblers, Crows, Drongos, Bulbuls, Shrikes, and Parakeets are visible. Of the three species of Mynas seen here, namely Indian Myna, Pied Myna and Brahminy Myna, the last one migrates out from the township during the winter and starts arriving only in April.

In one year of my bird watching, I have been able to count more than 65 species of birds inside the township, which are listed below. It is admitted that the list is an incomplete one but I am sure that with more experience, I will be able to add many more species to the list.

Check-list of birds of BHEL - BHOPAL Township

Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Pond Heron, Bengal Vulture, White Scavenger, Vulture, Black-winged Kite, Pariah Kite, Grey Partridge, Common Peafowl, Whitebreasted Waterhen, Redwattled Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Common Sandpiper, Blue Rock Pigeon, Ring Dove, Little Brown Dove, Roseringed Parakeet, Koel, Crow Pheasant, Pied Crested Cuckoo, Copper Smith, Spotted Owlet, House Swift, Hoopoe, Blossomheaded Parakeet, Indian Roller, Small Green Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher, Small Blue Kingfisher, Whitebreasted Kingfisher, Brownheaded Storkbilled Kingfisher, Wryneck, Blackheaded Yellow Bulbul, Crested Lark, Indian Small Skylar, Indian Pipit, Common Swallow, Rufousbacked Shrike, Common Wood Shrike, Black Drongo, Golden Oriole, Indian Myna, Brahminy Myna, Jungle Crow, House Crow, Redvented Bulbul, Common Babbler, Whitebrowed Faintail Flycatcher, Large Grey Babbler, Blue Throat, Indian Wren-Warbler, Ashy Wren-Warbler, Magpie Robin, Indian Robin, Collared Bushchat, Redstart Grey Wagtail, White Wagtail, Large Pied Wagtail, Tickell's Flowerpecker, Purple Sunbird, White-eye, Baya Weaver Bird, White Throated Munia, Pied Myna, House Sparrow.

Correspondence

Swans in the Stratosphere, by Peter Jackson

Reports by mountaineers of spotting birds at 27,000 feet around Mount Everest, and elsewhere at great heights in the Himalaya are always intriguing. Many of the migrants must obviously cross the mountains at great heights "because they are there", as Mallory might have said.

But recently it has been disclosed that birds fly at these great heights even over the sea. On 9 December 1967 a radar controller

in Northern Ireland picked up an echo at 26-28,000 feet. A passing airliner checked and sighted a flock of 30 swans. Their height was registered at just over 27,000 feet.

Following a note about this record in British Birds some further investigation has been carried out about the weather patterns at the time. It is guessed that the birds were Whooper Swans (*Cygnus cygnus*) from Iceland. At the time there was a very cold air mass over Britain, and N. Elkins has the following interpretation in British Birds:

"If one assumes that the flock originated in Iceland, upper-level winds along its route suggest a departure after dawn in a building ridge of high pressure, and a subsequent climb through a strong NNW wind flow into the edge of the northerly jet stream, with a total flight time of approximately seven hours.

At 8,200 m (27,000 ft) the swans were in the lower stratosphere and clear of the large snow showers which existed over the sea. Over the Hebrides, the temperature at that altitude was -48°C and the wind northerly at 50m per second (100 knots). Their ground speed would have decreased rapidly during the period of observation as they descended through a zone of strong wind shear, and the 37m per second (75 knots) quoted would have been an approximate mean. It is possible that they may have been at an even greater altitude before the observation.

It seems incredible that sustained flight can occur under such physiologically rigorous environmental conditions. The atmospheric pressure at 8,000m is only one-third of that at the earth's surface, and both air density and oxygen concentration are only 40 per cent. The latter figure is an indication of the efficiency of the avian respiratory system compared with that of man, who normally requires additional oxygen supply above 4-5,000m (13,000-16,500 feet)."

I wonder if there are any bird watchers among Air India and Indian Airlines crews who have seen birds at great altitudes.

The Hanflong Phenomenon by ZF

In response to the article by Theodore Bhaskaran in the June 1979 issue Peter Jackson has sent excerpts from the Book "Migration and Survival of the Birds of Asia (1974) by Elliott McClure, from which it appears that in other parts of the world too birds are attracted by strong light and come to an untimely end. McClure writes:

"Tropical migration: Many species perform periodical migrations in the tropics. These are difficult to define where these movements are continental.

The most dramatic material came from Luzon. Luzon has an area of 40,420 sq.mi. (Wernstedt and Spencer 1967) and Dalton Pass, at about 3,500 feet, is north centrally located in the island with mountain ranges both east and west of it and cultivated lowlands to the N.E. and S.W.

In the mountains of northern Luzon the Igorots have for centuries practiced what they have called "Pangkikan" or "sharing with the gods" (Alcasid, 1965). Each fall they built small lean-tos or shacks open toward the north on the peaks of ridges or hills facing north.

On foggy moonless nights they built fires in these shacks and shared the birds which the gods sent to them. Now they have improved the method with pressure lanterns and reflectors behind which they stand with large nets. As migrant birds approach, flying low over the mountains in the fog they come toward the lights and are captured. From a method of fortuitous catching in the past it has now become a methodical harvest with hundreds of lights and nets on every ridge.

At Dalton Pass between the mountain ridges each dawn Mr. Alcasid and his assistants bought birds from the netters. Of the thousands caught each night only these few survived to be released, the rest were eaten".

a) Breeding Season of House Crow by Indra Kumar Sharma

In response to M.H. Himmatsinhji note in the August 79 issue of the Newsletter it is my experience that the nest building activity of the house crow starts in the 4th week of May when the maximum temperature is 41°C and minimum 27°C with the humidity at 45% at 8 a.m. in the morning. I refer to the semi arid area around Jodhpur. This somewhat severe period is chosen presumably because when the young ones arrive in July/August there is plenty of food in the way of caterpillars and beetles. I suppose that in various parts of India the breeding season of birds synchronises with the food requirements of the young.

The clutch size seems to vary from 3 to 5 eggs, but mainly consists of 3 eggs. The breeding success seems to be poor. Very often only one chick survives, and sometimes two. Cats, Pariah Kites, and the Great Owl (*Bubo bubo*) are the main predators.

b) Auto-eroticism in the Roseringed Parakeet by Indra Kumar Sharma

Kishore Gohil, Newsletter August 1979, describes the courtship of a parakeet without a female and he enquires whether other bird-watchers have noted such behaviour. I have a pet budgerigar.

(*Melopsittacus undulatus*) and I find that the male often indulges in courtship behaviour in the corner of the cage when the females are busy incubating. The roseringed parakeet and the budgeriger belong to the same Order, *Pssitaciformes*).

c) House Crows Attacking Laggar Falcon and Short-toed Eagle by
Indra Kumar Sharma

I noticed an extraordinary incident on the 20th August in Zalamand village 10 kms from Jodhpur. A party of house crows made a determined attack on an immature Laggar Falcon and Short-toed Eagle, and ultimately the two birds of prey were completely exhausted and fell down and collapsed on the ground. Is it possible that the House Crow is responsible for the dwindling population of our birds of prey? Presumably they do some damage to the juveniles.

Our Contributors

Mr. T.V. Narayana, c/o. Mr. K. Ramesam, Howard Finley Consultants, 95, V.M. Street, Madras 600 004.

Mr. Y.M. Rai, 414, Kutchery Road, Meerut 250 002.

Mr. K.K. Mandalaywala, Production Engineer, Qtr.No.579-D2; D-Sector, Piplani, Bhopal 462021.

Mr. Peter Jackson, Haut Verger, 1171, Bougy-Villars, Switzerland.

Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagawati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur 342020.

Subscription for 1979 have been received from:

U.P.

Kumari Anuradha Singh, c/o. Dr. C.M. Singh, Director, IURI, Izatnagar;
Rs.15/- .

Tamil Nadu

Mr. T.V. Narayana, c/o. Mr. K. Ramesam, Howard Finley Consultants,
95, V.M. Street, Madras 600 004.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 11 NOVEMBER, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

Vol.XIX No.11

November 1979

Contents

Four Additions to the Delhi List and other interesting records, by Sudhir Vyas.

Birding Around Kodi: A tract of climax forest: Part II : by T.V. Narayana.

A Warning by A.S. Bhaduri.

Correspondence

Comments by M.K. Himmatsinhji.

Observations on Finn's Baya Breeding Near Meerut by Y.M. Rai.

Comments by A.Mani .

Nesting of Redheaded Merlin (Falco chicquera) by Subramanya.S.

Comments by T.V. Jose.

Move for Census of Great Indian Bustard (Courtesy Times of India, Communicated by Harkirat S. Sangha).

Subscriptions

Four Additions to the Delhi List and other interesting records,
by Sudhir Vyas

I have been stationed at Delhi since November 77 (with the exception of 6 months, from April 78 to September 78) and have been birdwatching extensively during this period. I have been using Mrs. Usha Ganguli's book 'A Guide to the Birds of the Delhi Area' and Mr. Abdulali's checklist of the Birds of Delhi, Agra, and Bharatpur as basic checklists. With reference to these, I would like to put forward my own observations.

Firstly, four new additions:

(1) The Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*). I saw a Spotted Crake at Sultanpur jheel (a bird sanctuary), some 48 km from the centre of Delhi, on the 4th of May 1979. At 8 a.m. in the morning, the bird walked out into the open from some reeds around a little pond at the first lake (just below the rest-house). I froze instantly. The bird walked about fed and bathed in the open, giving me an uninterrupted view for over 20 minutes, at about 20 feet distance. I watched it through 10 x 50 binoculars. My notes read: Size: Myna -; grey eyebrow, sides of neck and breast; whitish chin; dark brown crown and broad stripe through eye; upperparts reddish brown with short white streaks, a white edge to the wing. Rump, tail and flanks, reddish brown with clear white bars. Under tail coverts buff. Sides of neck and breast speckled with white throughout. Beak stout yellow, with a red base (extending on to forehead); legs, dark green.

From the Birds of Britain and Europe by Hollom et. al., The Birds of Britain and Europe by Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow, and Salim Ali's 10 Vol. Handbook, I am certain this was a spotted crake. The illustration on page 115 of Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow shows my bird exactly, except that the grey of the breast was purer and darker, a broad dark brown eyestripe separated distinctly from the grey eyebrow was more prominent, and the white barring on the flanks was more clear cut.

I am familiar with Baillon's Crake and there can be no confusion with that species.

Salim Ali says that the Spotted Crake has been recorded throughout most of India; U. Ganguli does not include it in her book; Abdulali's list indicates that it has been recorded from Bharatpur/Agra, but not Delhi. This seems to be a first record for the Delhi area.

(2) The Yellowbellied Longtail Warbler (*Prinia flaviventris*). At Okhla (South Delhi) there is a wier across the Jumna river. Above the wier, two channels of water lead back upstream - one being the main river, the other a creek which extends towards the New Okhla

Industrial Development Area. Between the two is a 'Peninsula' of land, part of this is cultivated, the rest is swamp and marsh with extensive beds of grass and reeds. One can walk onto the peninsula from the farther side of the river, or better still, hop onto a little rowing boat that plies between the fields and huts on the peninsula and the Okhla headworks garden, back and forth for a rupee.

On this peninsula, on 7th March 79, my attention was drawn to an unfamiliar song emanating from the reeds and grass thickets - "tik-tik-twiddle lilili". It turned out to be a wren-warbler - dark grey head, faint white eyebrow, olive-green back, white throat and breast sharply demarcated from the bright lemon-yellow belly. The tail was greenish brown, faintly crossrayed, frequently expanded to show the individual feathers. The Yellowbellied Longtail Warbler turned out to be quite common in this patch of reeds and grass, pairs or parties being usually within ear-short. They also had a nasal "Tee-tee-tee" and a snapping sound as they flew. They were second in abundance only to the streaked Wren-Warbler (*Prinia gracilis*). Other members of the genus present in the same patch were the Ashy and the Plain (*P. socialis* and *P. subflava*).

I have not seen this bird anywhere else around Delhi. At this place (Okhla) it is common and possibly resident. I visited this place several times since then, and it has been there, as common and noisy as ever. I noted that it was singing freely throughout March, April, and May.

From what I gather from Salim Ali's Handbook, the western race of this species is a resident of riverain grass jungle of the Indus system. It has been seen at Ambala, which I gather is the eastern limit. From 'Birds of Nepal' (Fleming, Fleming and Bangdel) it has been recorded from the Central Nepal terai (eastern race?).

Thus the species presence in Delhi is most interesting. Last years (1978) floods around Delhi may have left enough appropriate grass and reed growth along canals etc to have flooded the bird out of the Indus network on to the Ganga system (Jumna). Then as the floods receded the species may have got isolated on the Jumna. This may also explain the presence of the next two species, both new records of the area.

In any case, the birds are still there at Okhla, and anyone interested can easily find them. I wonder if the species has this year been recorded anywhere east of the Indus system.

I would also note from Mrs. Ganguli's book that a single Longtailed Grass Warbler (*Prinia burnesii*) was recorded by H. Alexander in Delhi in January (year not given). This bird has a similar distribution to the Yellowbellied. Most intriguing.

- (3) The Striated Marsh Warbler (*Megalurus palustris*). I first recorded this species in the coronation marshes on the 4th of November 78. The coronation marshes are a few square kilometers of smelly swamp and reedy

ponds (there is sewage plant nearby) near the coronation pillow (of the 1971 Durbar fame) the Jumna had flooded this low-lying area in September 78. On the 4th of November there were 3 or 4 Striated Marsh Warblers in a patch of reeds walking about on the ground, perching on babool trees, and flying into the air with slow wingbeats singing their peculiar song.

I had excellent views of the birds from closeby, their narrow tail, clear black streaks on the back, reddish buff rump, sharp eyebrow, white throat and finely streaked underparts separating it from the Striated and Common Babblers (*Turdoides earlei* and *Turdoides caudatus*) both of which are common in the neighbourhood. Their habit of walking on the ground is also distinctive. I am familiar with the species in Avadh and Assam and there is no possibility of confusion.

The birds were seen at the Coronation marshes upto April 79 - after that I have failed to locate them. Delhi falls within the range of the species as given in the Handbook "from Pakistan eastwards into Assam", the species is however, not included in either U. Ganguli's or Mr. Abdulali's checklist. I have not seen the species anywhere else in Delhi.

(4) The Whitetailed Stone Chat (*Saxicola leucura*). I first saw a pair of this species on 10th February 78 in the Coronation marshes in North Delhi in a much trampled drying up patch of reeds. I next visited this place on 17th December 78, and the pair was still there. In January 79 there were two pairs noticeable. At this time I thought the species may be a winter visitor from the U.P. Terai, which is its native habitat.

However on 7-3-79, I found the species common on the reedy swampy area above the Okhla wier (mentioned above), and I found white-tailed stone chats common there! I noted at least 7 separate pairs. What is more, I got the distinct impression that they were breeding, as males were singing, and one pair (both birds) were seen carrying insects to a definite spot in the marsh. This was confirmed on 25th March 79, when I found a pair feeding two just fledged young. The male kept perching on the tops of the tall dry grasses, uttering low 'peeps' and flicking his tail, as I approached to within 10 feet of the young birds. These were mottled brown above, whitish below, spotted on the throat and breast with brown, and with very short tails. I only saw the female actually feed the young. On the same day (25th March) another pair were found building a nest!

These stone chats have been present in both these areas till the present, and apparently resident.

The male white-tailed stone chat has a habit of flicking open his tail, when the white inner webs of all the retrices (except the central) are very noticeable both from above and below. The male Stone Chats (*Saxicola torquata*) tail looks black from below. *S. leucura*'s looks

white. White on tail and rump is also conspicuous in flight. Also the reddish patch on the breast of *S. leucura* is pinker than that of *S. torquata*, rather sharply defined from the purer white of the underparts, which also runs up on either side of the reddish patch to meet the white collar.

The female *S. leucura* looks darker than the female *S. torquata*, is less streaked above and more mottled below, and lacks the reddish rump.

This species is not in either Mrs. Ganguli's or Mr. Abdulali's lists, and I consider it a new record for the Delhi area.

I get the distinct impression that the yellowbellied longtail warbler and the striated marsh warbler have established themselves in Delhi on account of the September 78 floods; white-tailed stone chat possibly a few years earlier, for it is unlikely to have been missed during the time when Mrs. Ganguli and other members of the new defunct (or is it?) Delhi Birdwatching Society covered this area so intensively. In any case these species are now very much in Delhi and can be seen by anyone interested in the two localities mentioned above.

Birding Around Kodi: A tract of climax forest: Part II: by T.V. Narayana

Walks along the magnificent sholas around Kodi or on the Coolie Ghat road will add many more birds to your list, remembering that the best time for birding is in the early morning. Not having a car at my disposal, many exciting localities such as the lower Palnis, were beyond my reach; I was restricted to forays along the ghat road from where I could easily catch a bus or hitch a ride on a lorry to return after birding to Kodi. Naturally, some of the birds described in Part I like black bulbuls, white-eyes and other species were also seen in the sholas; conversely, certain species (e.g. the black-and-orange flycatcher, yellow-cheeked tit and the ubiquitous small green barbets) were also seen in town.

The yellow browed bulbul, which is yellow all over but brighter yellow below, moves about in small flocks and is easily located by its double whistling call. Another species, essentially restricted to the peninsula (while the yellow-browed bulbul occurs in Ceylon and the West of the peninsula), but famous for its whistling song is the Malabar whistling-thrush or 'whistling schoolboy'. The beautiful blue bird, which appears almost black at a distance, is seen to have patches of a more brilliant blue on its shoulder and forehead. However, its handsome appearance is less remarkable than its ethereal song. It is a delightful, virtuoso performance that dominates the sound of

rushing torrents and appears to emanate from and fill the very heavens. Having seen, but not heard, the Himalayan whistling-thrush, which belongs to the same genus as the whistling schoolboy, I am unable to compare their songs. With luck you might see - and will surely hear from this point - the famed songster sitting on the parapet of Tiger Shola near a stone-post marked 6. But if you intend to search for him away from the road, you should be equipped with knee-high boots against leeches.

A trio of flycatchers, the black-and-orange, the white-bellied blue, and the grey-headed next merit attention. The first, which is extremely handsome and unmistakeable for any other bird, is endemic to the ghat regions of S India. Ali describes its distribution as 'local and patchy'; it is not particularly afraid of man, like the other flycatchers, and can be observed at leisure. But for the fact that it is a denizen of fairly dense undergrowth where the sun's rays do not set off its striking livery, I would feel inclined to compare its beauty with even that of the orange minivet. The latter, a bird of the tree tops, is visible to the naked eye, under suitable conditions, at least a quarter of mile away. When illuminated by the glorious morning sun, this race of the scarlet minivet leaves an unforgettable impression with its burnished orange and (relatively less) black of its plumage.

Only a careless birdwatcher would confuse the white-bellied blue flycatcher with the verditer in full adult plumage. Apart from the white belly, the bluer 'horns' or patch on the forehead of the former set it apart immediately from the latter. Its illustration in Ali and Ripley's monumental 10 volume work brings this out clearly. It is one of the interesting species distributed in the W. Ghats of India, but not Ceylon, and from Burma on eastwards. The grey-headed flycatcher is more continuous in its distribution, occurs also in Ceylon and throughout the Himalayas and suitable portions of India to Indochina and Indonesia. It is notable as the harbinger of the famous mixed flocks of several species which occur in the tropical forests the world over. In Tiger Shola it had a pleasant song which I can only render as 'Take more bottles'; perhaps the solemn call of the Indian Cuckoo in the Nepal terai 'One more bottle' (or cross-word puzzle) heard a couple of weeks before, was still in my mind. Both in the terai and the Palnis around Oothu I heard the famous 'Brain-fever' call; the bird in the Palnis should be the common hawk-cuckoo, (as the large does not occur in the Shembag Museum list). Thus the delightful warnings heard from the same spot in the terai - of 'one more bottle' and 'brain-fever' - did not have their Palni counterpart, as I was unsuccessful in locating the grey-headed flycatcher below Oothu on the ghat road.

To return to the mixed flocks so often associated with the last-named bird, they contained - apart from the everpresent white-eyes - the Nilgiri flowerpecker, the yellow cheeked tit, the velvet-fronted nuthatch and on one glorious occasion, the small sunbird. Surprisingly

I did not meet the grey tit (*Parus major*) or perhaps overlooked this familiar species in the mixed flocks; but his yellow-cheeked cognate was met from nearly 2300 meters to below 1000 meters. One nuthatch, on a horizontal branch in a mixed flock, hammered at a moth or other insect almost in woodpecker fashion. As for the small sunbird, restricted to the Palnis, Nilgiris and Ceylon, I had one incomplete view of him at Sim's Park in Coonoor over a decade ago. Having spent a considerable number of hours, among the parks and gardens of Kodi without seeing him, I now met a non-breeding male. He obligingly fluttered before a clump of wild flowers in Tiger Shola revealing every field mark and the iridescent rump. Not only did I feel entirely compensated for my long wait but my elation also makes me offer the following Burns' stanza in his honour:

The flaunting flow'rs our gardens yield,	
Barbed-wire fences now must shield,	(from cows)
But thou seekest the random bield,	(shelter)
Of flowers by stane;	(stone of shola)
Far, far from every furrowed field,	
Unseen, alane!	(alone)

(The homely doric is translated beside the verse itself, where an occasional comment is also inserted).

Halfway down the ghat road at the level of Oothu, the stands of eucalyptus are over and plantations begin. On a lucky day we saw both the crested hawk-eagle and larger goldenback woodpecker, in practically neighbouring trees. The hawk-eagle, which was distracted by protests from a tree-pie only 6 feet away from it, gave us a splendid view of the chocolate and black streaks on its white underparts. Its identification was clinched by the long crest of a few black feathers behind its head. The larger goldenback differs from the very common goldenback woodpecker of the plains and foothills by having a crimson instead of black rump, and being larger and heavier. The grackle myna and the dainty Indian lorikeet can be seen at Oothu, as well as more familiar birds like the coppersmith barbet, scarlet minivets etc. Dr. Riesz of Madurai college, the congenial and knowledgeable spirit of birding in these parts, has seen hornbills and spurfowls at this level, the latter sometimes being captured by the residents of the area. The crow-pheasant is also common both above and below Oothu, although I have not seen it in Kodi.

While birding on the Pannaikadu road above Oothu, I had the good fortune to meet planter SB, who kindly offered to take me through his plantation and adjoining forest below Oothu. As such an opportunity might not arise again, I postponed my ascent of Perumal and decided to visit his plantation and forest. Since the plantation was at a low altitude relatively, it assured some intermingling of birds of plains and hills. Without listing all plains birds, I noted both small and scarlet minivets and purple sunbirds in winter plumage (or could they be purple-rumped sunbirds as suggested by the Shembag list?). Among the more exciting finds were

a Besra sparrow-hawk and the delightful lorikeets. I did not notice the diagnostic streaks or stripes on the face and neck of the Besra. But I am quite familiar with the shikra, and both from habitat and certain obvious differences I concluded it must be a Besra. I showed to planter SB the beautiful lorikeets swaying and conversing on small branches in a tamarind tree while searching for nectar - sometimes upside down - in the blossoms. He was so delighted with them that he promised to be a good conservationist. Never allow that magnificent forest tract by your plantation to be cut down, SB'.

I was also thrilled by seeing a male black-headed cuckoo-shrike which is rare in summer in the Palnis, as well as the 'arabic-speaking' blue-winged parakeet (read Ali and Ripley for the delightful story of the Bababudan parrot). To familiarise myself with these birds, I arose early and found myself by 7.15 a.m. at my forest tract at the very next opportunity. What at first appeared like black bulbuls in the treetops, turned out to be grey drongos! It is difficult to describe one's emotions in a virgin tract undisturbed for thousands of years and slowly my sense of proportion regarding birdsizes got adjusted to the splendid sunlit heights. Yellow-browed bulbuls were calling incessantly, but looked the size of sparrows. Far above on the left was the hammering of a woodpecker, reminding me of a machine-gun. But the Malabar great black woodpecker, who probably was the author of the drumming, remained invisible. Grackle mynas and the whistling schoolboy were seen again, but my careful search for the trogon was a failure. However, bronzed drongos were sighted at the edge of the forest and a large racket-tailed drongo settled high up in the sunlit foliage, affording a perfect view. As I watched the flight of this splendid bird, whose rackets were just visible as two bumblebees pursuing it, I felt I had stepped into the great shoes of the young Salim Ali himself! I hope to return to this tract and chronicle the tale of its avian residents, including many skulkers, at a latter date.

A Warning by A.S. Bhaduri

It is always interesting to go through the writings of Sri Ananta Mitra. In "Waterhens" (Vol. XIX, No.6) he has described with great feeling how the habitat of some waterhens was being steadily ruined in a suburb of Calcutta making the life of these hapless birds more and more difficult. There is no doubt that sooner or later those birds will leave the area for better living conditions elsewhere. And the bird life of the area will be decidedly the poorer for the absence of those birds whose voice was likened by the inimitable EHA to the agonized voice of a bear being slowly roasted alive!

The plight of those waterhens makes us tragically conscious how in Calcutta, because of increasing disturbances to their habitats, a great many interesting and colourful birds are steadily leaving us over the years. If, in our indifference or obtuseness, we do nothing about it, the chances of our being left with only those hangers-on of men like crows and sparrows and such other unlovable and uninspiring birds are only too great.

I remember, fifteen or sixteen years ago, a nondescript wagtail used to trip along the space in and around the open water cistern in our backyard during the winter months. That wagtail has not showed itself again, not even once, throughout all these years. This year I have not yet heard, though it is now October, the harsh grating call of the brown shrike whose strident call used to ring out every evening from late August to March or April next every year. I do not know if this very common visitor too has left our vicinity for good. I do not remember to have heard the voice of the brain fever bird last year or this year even once. The voice of these birds was quite common a bird call in the summer and the monsoon months. The bulbuls, both the redvented and the redwhiskered varieties, were common in our area, but they are now rarely seen. The voices of the coppersmiths and the spotted doves are becoming increasingly infrequent. Where have they all gone, the white breasted kingfishers, the pied mynas, the purple sunbirds and that glory in yellow and black, the black headed oriole? It seems I have neither heard nor seen them for ages in our locality. The magpie-robin is still there, thank God. It still sings lustily from the top of a tree or a house and fills a sunny morning with blessed cheerfulness. But their number is definitely on the wane. Last night, I heard the voice of the spotted owlet after a long time. So this bird is still with us. A few years ago, I used to listen to this owlet's jabbering call almost every night. I can go on with this tale or woe with regard to many other common birds. But the little that I have related should suffice to open our eyes to the gravity of the situation.

Perhaps, in more leafy and moister areas of Calcutta, the situation is a little better. But how long the better situation will prevail that is the question. I do not know what can be done about it, but unless something is done and that too very quickly, I am sure, nothing can save us from the fate of having to watch and listen to only the unholy crows and the squabbling sparrows and the dullard pigeons in the near future.

Correspondence

Comments by M.K. Himmatsinhji

On reading the information given by Indrakumar Sharma about the breeding of the House Crow in his area, I am prompted to mention the rather unusual breeding results of the bird in my compound this year. Out of about six pairs that built nests I saw and heard one young Koel each with two pairs and two Koel chicks with a third pair. None of the pairs raised any chicks of their own till September. It was on the 30th September that I first heard the begging calls of young crows in two nests, containing one chick each. We had extremely heavy rainfall accompanied by very strong gales in the beginning of August, and it is likely that owing to this storm some nests were blown away and some young ones perished due to the exposure to rain and the cold wind. That perhaps also accounts for the second attempt of the two pairs, having one chick each of their own, at raising a brood.

Whenever I comment on what Indrakumar Sharma writes, I do so with trepidation and a great amount of circumspection! However I cannot help saying a few words on the example given by him of the courtship display of a male PET Budgerigar without a female in connection with the observation of Kishore Gohil of a free-ranging wild Parakeet. It goes without saying that the caged Budgerigars that we see today being kept as pets have been bred in captivity through many generations, and so are bound to have changed their pattern of behaviour to some extent. I have kept many budgies, both in small cages as well as in a large aviary; and hence have had ample opportunities to study their behaviour which, as I have already mentioned, is perhaps somewhat different from even their own wild progenitors in Australia. The male Budgerigar sings a chattering song frequently all throughout the day, and while doing this he demonstrates at the bars of the cage or the perch by shaking his head at and banging his bill on the object concerned. This demonstration is similar to his loveplay with a female, though not exactly the same. Apart from this, I have seen budgies and a couple of other parrot species go through all the erotic movements (including mating with their perches) when kept alone without a mate for a long time. But these examples would not fit in with the subject matter of Kishore Gohil's correspondence, as they concern the artificial behaviour of caged birds whose natural movements and urges were restricted within the four corners of their cages.

Regarding chasing of birds of prey by crows, and bringing them down through exhaustion, may I be permitted to state that this is a common reaction of House Crows, and also some other birds in nature, to chivy hawks particularly when they venture too near the nests or young of the birds concerned. I have also recently come across a case of a juvenile Short-toed Eagle being brought down by House Crows. I kept it for a little while in one of my chicken coupes and when let out it flew away. Such cases in nature are few and far-between, and which do not occur so often enough so as to reduce the populations of eagles and hawks. However the greatest menace to the wellbeing of the birds of prey today is the use of strong pesticides on a wide scale, as already proved in the advanced countries of the world where statutory restrictions are enforced on the manufacture and sale of insecticides having these harmful substances.

What I have stated above is based on my observations and study of both aviary birds as well as the birds in the wild. If I have erred in any way, I would gladly stand corrected by an expert like Lavkumar Khacher. In the meanwhile, writing in a lighter vein to break the monotony of a serious subject, and with no offence meant to either of the two gentlemen, I would leave it to Lavkumar to decide whether the example of auto-eroticism in a PET MALE Budgerigar, given by Indrakumar Sharma, falls within the definition of 'male chauvinism'!

Observations on Finn's Baya Breeding Near Meerut by Y.M. Rai

Hastinapur, about 30 kms across flight northeast of Meerut has a vast marshland overgrown with Typha elephantina. Kans (Saccharum spontaneum) grows extensively all around with patches of Sirhu (Imperata cylindrica) here and there. Sarpat (Imperata arundinacea) is nonexistent here. In and around the marshes there are scattered trees of Seesam (Dalbergia sissoo) and Semal (Bombax malabaricum). Bordering the marshes there is extensive cultivation of paddy and sugarcane. In this ecological backdrop was discovered the colony of nesting Finn's Baya (Ploceus megarhynchus) on 17th June 1979. Observations were made upto the first week of August '79 which revealed the following facts:-

1. The period of breeding activity of Finn's Baya here is approximately of 45 days.
2. The breeding at Hastinapur covers only the months of June and July (vide ref. Ali, Salim & Ripley, S.Dillon. The Handbook of Birds of India & Pakistan).
3. The nest building needs about 15 days, though additional nest activity by males continues for about a month.
4. The female uses the floss usually of Imperata cylindrica to line the nests.
5. Feeding of the young is done mostly by females, males sparingly taking part in it.
6. Other colonies of Finn's Baya indicate that its breeding at Hastinapur is not uncommon.
7. The Finn's Baya for breeding here has a preference for the tree of Seesam though Semal is as much present here as the former.

Dr. Salim Ali was informed about the breeding of Finn's Baya here. His comment is as follows: 'Since its rediscovery in the Pantnagar area a few years ago we have had several reports from various localities in U.P. and it is clear that the bird is quite common and widely distributed in the Gangetic plain. The fact that it can be so readily confused with the Common Baya in its non breeding plumage is evidently largely responsible for the paucity of information on it in former years.'

Comments by A.Mani

I was interested to see the note on "Swans in the Stratosphere" by Peter Jackson. The tropopause or the lower limit of the stratosphere occurs at heights of about 16 km in the tropics and about 10 km over the temperate latitudes. So the high altitudes of 27,000 ft. (8,200 m) mentioned in the Note fall within the troposphere and not the lower stratosphere. The height of the tropopause above the earth's surface varies considerably with latitude and season. It also varies with the weather situation, being normally lower over areas of low pressure than over areas of high pressure. But generally the tropopause is well above 10 km over the high latitudes mentioned and definitely over the Himalaya. So it might be more accurate not to use the term stratosphere, in the Note. The Note, especially the last paragraph on the efficiency of the avian respirating system at these high altitudes is extremely interesting.

Nesting of Redheaded Merlin (Falco chicquera) by Subramanya.S.

Recently I happened to go through Mr. R.N. Dharap's note on 'Redheaded Merlins nesting in a densely populated area' (NLBW 16(10):11-12) . In this connection I would like to quote a similar instance of the bird nesting in an urbanized set up.

In the second week of October 1978, I sighted a pair of Redheaded Merlins on a lone cassuarina tree (75-80 feet in height) amidst a residential locality in Bangalore. Subsequent observations confirmed that the Merlins were nesting. The nest was a thick platform of twigs well concealed by the foliage on a forked branch of the tree, 65-70 feet from the ground. My visit to the spot on the 6th March 1979, revealed that the Merlins were successful in raising a brood of three. Their presence at the nesting site even this year seems to indicate that they would go through it again.

This and the observation of Mr. Dharap seems to be unusual and interesting when compared with the habitats mentioned in the Handbook . "Affects deciduous plains, plateau and low foot hill country interspersed with groves of trees, cultivation and villages. Avoids forests".

Comments by T.V.Jose

I refer here to "Birdwatching at Atherampalley by R. Sugathan" in NLBW (Sept. 79). The observation of a racket-tailed drongo feeding the young one of a cuckoo-shrike is at any rate a rare one. It is a significant example of maternal (or paternal?) instinct working at interspecific level. Real happiness of a naturalist lies, as I understand it, in getting peeps into the inner structure of another organisms mind. The more hidden it is the greater the intensity of happiness. As in any other matter, one should however be blessed with luck in addition to perseverance and the ability for keen and sustained observation.

Three cheers to Mr. R. Sugathan!

Move for Census of Great Indian Bustard (Courtesy Times of India, Communicated by Harkirat S. Sangha)

The Rajasthan Government's forest department will launch a systematic survey to locate Great Indian Bustards.

According to information received by officials there are fairly large number of birds in Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and parts of Phalodi. However, no bid has been made to verify the information.

The data to be collected by the forest officials will be presented at an international symposium next year under the auspices of Tourism and Wildlife Association of India. Hundreds of employees of the forest department are expected to be associated with the census.

Our Contributors

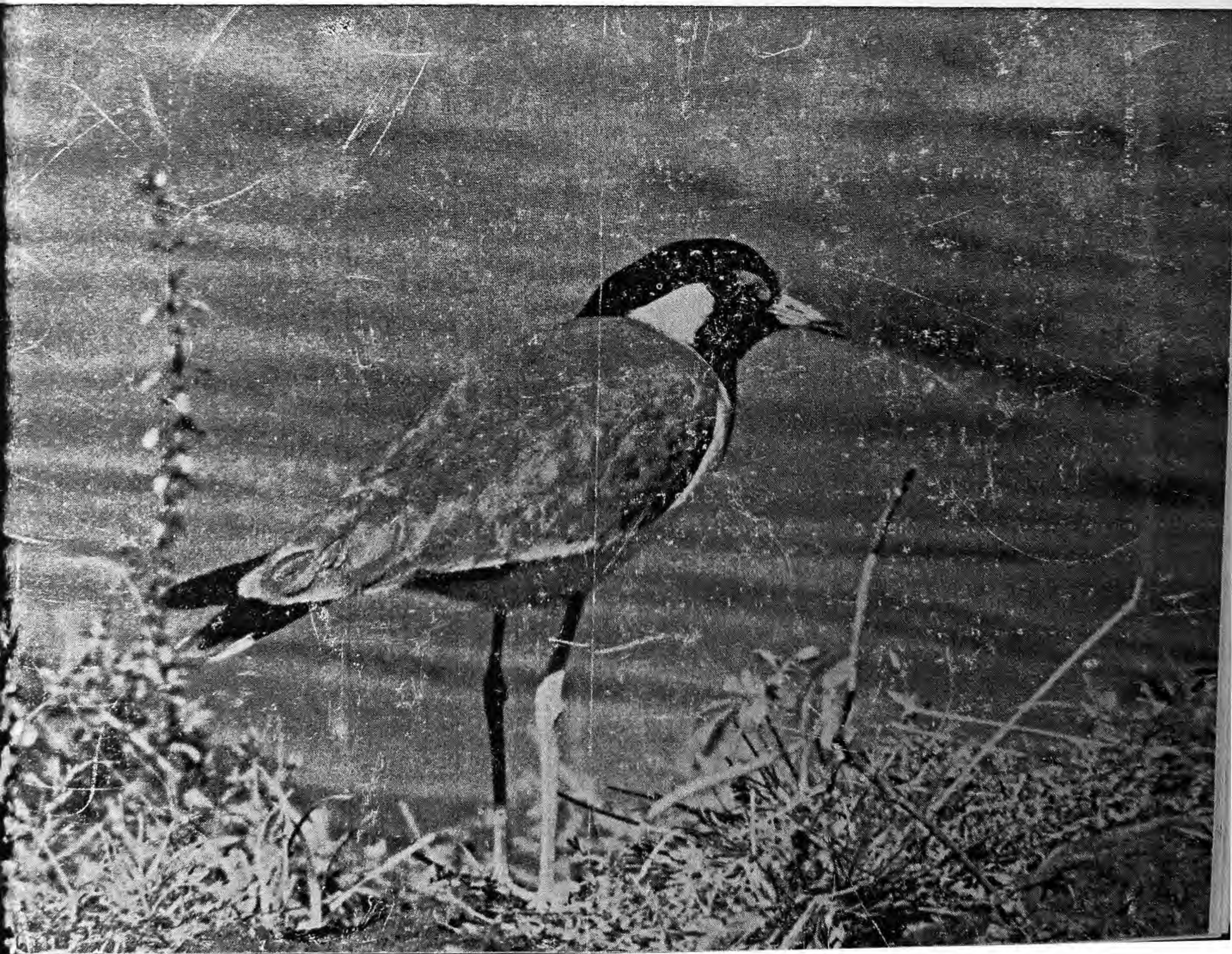
Mr. Sudhir Vyas, 53, Newal Kishore Road, Lucknow 226001.
 Mr. T.V. Narayan, c/o. Mr. K. Ramesam, Howard Finley Consultants,
 95, V.M. Street, Madras 600 004.
 Mr. A.S. Bhaduri, 58-D, Alipur Road, Calcutta 700 027.
 M.K. Himmatsinhji, Jubilee Ground, Bhuj-Kutch.
 Mr. Y.M. Rai, 414, W. Kutchery Road, Meerut 250001.
 Miss. A. Mani, Raman Research Institute, Bangalore 560 006.
 Mr. Subramanya.S., No.1373.II Stage, West of Chord Road, Rajajinagar,
 Bangalore 560 010.
 Mr. T.V. Jose, Flat No.34/671, MHB, New Siddharth Nagar, Goregaon
 (West), Bombay 400 062.
 Mr. Harkirat S. Sangha, L-10, Rudranorth, St. Stephen's College,
 Delhi 110 007.

Subscription* For 1979 have been received from:

U.P: Mr. Raja A.P. Singh, Belvedere Hotel, Naini Tal 263001, Rs.15/-;
Maharashtra: Dr. R.S. Bidwe, 48, Rarimar Peth, Pune, Rs.15/-;
Gujarat: Mr. Udayan Mehta, 8/A, Jeevan Sunniti Society, Mirambica Road,
 Naranpura, Ahmedabad, Rs.15/- ;
Dinanagar: Mr. Baldev Mitra, s/o. Shri. Behari Lal, B III/181, Inside
 Panyari Gate, District Gurdeshpur, 143531, Rs.16.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XIX NO. 12 DECEMBER, 1979



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XIX No. 12

December 1979

Contents

Additions to the Delhi list (continued) by Sudhir Vyas.

Birds of the Palnis - A checklist and museum list: Part III: by T.V. Narayana.

Some Comments on the Birdlife of Madras City, by Abraham Verghese.

Golden Oriole's unusual feat, by Prakash Garde.

Correspondence

Studies on Mynas by Drs. A.J. Baker and A. Moeed.

Plover by Rekha Shukla.

Extracts from a circular letter of 5-11-79 to subscribers of WWF from Rajkot by Lavkumar Khachar.

Birdwatching in Burnihat Valley, Assam/Meghalaya - Part I, by Dr. SAS Biswas.

Miscellaneous Notes by Thomas Gay.

Occurrence of Redwinged Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator coromandus*) in Vishakhapatnam by K.S.R. Krishna Raju.

A note on Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) from Ahmednagar (Maharashtra) by D.B. Pawar.

Najafgarh Jheel by Harkirat S. Sangha.

Insect Control by birds, by Indra Kumar Sharma.

Subscriptions and Donations

Additions to the Delhi list(continued) by Sudhir Vyas

I would also like to mention a few other records which are of interest because of their rarity in the area, or because I find their status differs from what Mrs. Ganguli found in her time. a) Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*): 9 birds were present on the Jumna sandbanks behind Humayun's tomb and were seen from the 14th to the 19th of January 79. They fed with, but in flight separated from the large number of Brahminies also present. b) Falcated Teal (*Anas falcata*): A single male seen at Okhla on 2nd and 4th February 79. I had some excellent views of this beautiful duck. In company with Gadwall. c) Eagles: Imperial Eagles are occasionally seen near the Jumna behind Humayun's Tomb. Spotted Eagles at Sultanpur and once at Okhla. A peregrine appeared near the river in February 79. d) Common Cranes may still be seen around Delhi. I have seen a few at Sultanpur; on 14th January 79, 4 birds were seen near the river, flying low towards the south. On 24th March, about 150 birds flying north, over Okhla. e) Rails: Ganguli mentions only one record of the Brown Crake (1962). I saw several in the coronation marshes in winter of 78-79, and in March 79 at Okhla. The watercock was seen at the coronation marshes (several - at least 4 males) in July 79. f) Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) - 2 birds at close quarters on 6th May 79 on the sandbanks of the Jumna below Okhla; one in nearly complete breeding plumage, the other showing traces of black on the belly. g) Terek Sandpiper (*Tringa terek*) - This I believe is very rarely seen inland in India. Mrs. Ganguli records one bird on 4th May 68 at Okhla. I found a Terek Sandpiper on 9th May 79 on the sandbanks below the Okhla weir, associating with 2 wood-sandpipers. The short orange legs, upturned beak and flight pattern of a white hindedge to the wings (narrower than in the Redhsnak, with a grey rump and tail identified it. It allowed a close approach, and I could see a narrow black V across its back - indicating breeding plumage. Okhla may well be a regular stopover point for the occasional Terek Sandpiper in the first week or so of May - perhaps birdwatchers should keep an eye open for this species at this time. h) Dunlin and Curlew Sandpipers are both fairly frequent passage migrants in the first half of May - many in breeding plumage. Dunlin may also be seen in mid-winter in Okhla and more easily, at Sultanpur. i) Gulls seem to have increased in the Delhi area. Brown headed and Blackheaded are common throughout the winter; Herring and Great Blackheaded may also be seen in twos and threes on the river and at Sultanpur. j) Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*): I was pleasantly surprised to find this species still present at Delhi. I saw it coming to drink at dusk in the broken scrubby and rocky expanse behind Jawaharlal Nehru University campus. Common Sandgrouse are commoner and more widely distributed. k) Shorteared Owl: I disturbed one in reeds above the Okhla weir, 17th March 79. l) Franklin's Nightjar (*Caprimulgus affinis*) is normally considered a passage migrant in Delhi. I found them flying about and calling freely at dusk near the J.N.U. campus all through March, April and May 79. From Mrs. Ganguli's book I gather its also been seen in

June, July and August - it is quite possibly breeding in the area. m) Eastern Calandra Lark (*Melenocorypha bimaculata*) - Apparently only one earlier recorded by Mrs. Ganguli and P. Jackson. I found a flock of about 20 birds which haunted dry grazing grounds near the coronation marshes throughout February 77. In loose association with short-toed larks and sparrows. n) Ruby Throat (*E. calliope*) - Only 3 records mentioned by Mrs. Ganguli. On 31st October 78 I saw a beautiful male on the New Delhi Ridge, near the edge of the Buddha Jayanti Garden, singing softly from inside a babool tree. It is possibly a regular bird of passage, as it has been found a regular visitor to Bharatpur. o) The Black-breasted Weaver Bird is considered by Mrs. Ganguli to be 'very uncommon'. I have found large flocks of this species (over a hundred at times) in winter near the Jumna. In fact I would call it much commoner than the Striated Weaver which also occurs. p) Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolus*) - Fair sized flocks of this bird (20-40 individuals) mixed with House Sparrows haunted the coronation marshes in February 78. I have not seen them since.

This sums up the more interesting records that I have made during the last two years in Delhi. I am now being posted out of Delhi, but I hope other birdwatchers may be able to recheck these records in the next bird-year.

I may also add that I had the opportunity to visit Ladakh for 3 weeks in July-August this year. I couldn't go into the interior as I would have liked to, but I covered the region along the main road from Lamayur to Hemis. I was based at Leh. Among other things, interesting 'tibetan' species that I saw include: Tibetan Ravens, Adam's Snowfinches, Gold-fronted Serins, Ibisbills, Pied Magpies, Eastern Swifts, Redbilled Choughs, and others. I felt most peculiar seeing Tibetan Common Terns, commoner cormorants, and golden orioles in that terrain! Tibetan Short-toed Larks (*C. acutirostris*) were also seen. And also one solitary male Common Pochard in a little lake near the Indus River at Spituk, on migration probably!

Birds of the Palnis - A checklist and museum list: Part III : by T.V. Narayana.

When I visited the museum at Shembaganur, I heard the disturbing news that the library and possibly the historic museum and bird specimens would be transferred to Madras. Since some of the books and surely all the specimens will disintegrate in the heat of Madras, this list of museum specimens could be of interest to ornithologists (I omit the very common species). A number after the bird's name or birds' names indicates the month when it was collected. This museum list is already difficult to obtain and since the location where the

specimen was collected is usually indicated, this list has both historical value and gives excellent clues for the birdwatcher. The collection was essentially made 25 \pm 5 years ago.

Perumal

Brown Fish Owl/1
Pale Harrier, Red Spurfowl/2 Three-toed Goldenback Woodpecker/3
Intermediate Egret, Painted Bush Quail, Small Skylark, Ashy Swallow
Shrike, Red-headed Fantail Warbler/5 Malabar Crested Lark/6
Crested Goshawk, European Kestrel/11
Indian Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Emerald Dove, Woodcock/12
Mountain Hawk-Eagle (no month given)

Shembag

Common Buzzard/1
Indian Rosefinch/3 Black-headed Munia/4
Common Iora, Quaker Babbler/5 Scimitar Babbler/9 (Peninsular)
Indian Pitta, Green-billed Malkoha, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Yellow-
legged Button-quail, Forest Eagle Owl, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Indian
Blue Chat/10 Barn Owl/11 Eastern Grey Wagtail/12

Kodi Chestnut Bittern/5 Green Willow Warbler, Collared Scops Owl/12

Moir Points White-bellied Shortwing/4

Levinge Coorg Wren-warbler/6

(Birds above are from higher altitudes, while those below were collected lower)

Coolie Ghat Road and Tope

Blue-headed Rock Thrush, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Black-headed Babbler,
Paradise Flycatcher/2
Brown Shrike, Grey Hornbill, Gold-fronted Chloropsis, White-throated
Babbler, Ceylon Bush-lark, Plaintive Cuckoo, White-browed Bulbul/5
Little Spider Hunter/6 Malabar Wood Shrike/8
Fairy Blue-bird, Yellow-naped Woodpecker/9
Blue-tailed Bee-eater/12

Miscellaneous medium altitude birds (i.e. various locations)

Ruby-throated Bulbul/2 Wood Snipe/3
Crested Tree Swift/4 Tickell's Flycatcher, Grey-headed Bulbul/5
Great Indian Hornbill/5 (Palamalai) Yunnan Tree Pipit/4 (Mt. St. Mary)
Blossom-headed Parakeet, Whistling Teal/4 (Palni)
Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker/12 (Palni)
Malay Bittern/4 (Manalur) Bay-backed Shrike, Black-naped Blue Flycatcher,
Malabar Trogon, Jerdon's and Grey-fronted Imperial Pigeons/5 (Manalur)

On the basis of my own birdwatching, I recommend the following birds to

the special attention of the birdwatcher. (Underlined birds are easy; birds underlined --- are usually found at lower altitudes only.)

Western Ghat Specialities Wynaad Laughing Thrush Nilgiri Pipit
White-breasted Laughing Thrush White-bellied Shortwing Rufous Babbler
Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher Black & Orange Flycatcher

Birds Worth Searching for in Palnis Small Green Barbet
Nilgiri Wood Pigeon Malabar Whistling Thrush

(Last 3 birds in S Indian peninsula only, while next 3 are in peninsula and Ceylon only)

Malabar Grey Hornbill	Malabar Trogon (tough)	Small Sunbird
<u>Nilgiri Flowerpecker</u> (other races found in Assam and E and N of Assam)		
<u>Nilgiri House-Swallow</u> (also Ceylon & Burma to Tahiti)		
Larger Goldenback Woodpecker	Crested Hawk-Eagle	Alpine Swift
<u>Crested Serpent-Eagle</u>	Crested Honey-buzzard	
Besra Sparrow-Hawk	<u>Yellow-cheeked Tit</u>	Fairy Bluebird
<u>Velvet-fronted Nuthatch</u>	<u>Yellow-browed Bulbul</u>	<u>Grackle Myna</u>
<u>Grey Jungle-Fowl</u>	<u>Indian Lorikeet</u>	<u>Scarlet Minivet</u>
<u>Racket-tailed Drongo</u>	Red Spurfowl (hard)	<u>Ground Thrush</u>

Before I conclude with my own checklist (which has no historical presumptions like the museum list) which illustrates how a modern, coded computer list should be, I add a few further birds seen during July 6-13, 1979. The monsoon had already set in for three weeks and during my single visit to the forest tract of Part II, I had the distinct impression many birds had moved around already. The complicated local migrations which herald the onset of the monsoon may have been taking place or was it simply a bad day for birdwatching? At the higher altitudes little seemed changed: Grey Jungle Fowl and Nilgiri Wood Pigeons were seen on a trip to Berijam Lake. Ashy Wren-Warblers were seen at the beginning of the road ascending Perumal; without being absolutely certain, the same species and the Pied Flycatcher-shrike (Hemipus) were also seen near the orchards in Kodi. Spotted Munias were less conspicuous in town than before the monsoon. Walking up Perumal may be the most rewarding walk in S India, from the point of view of both birds and scenery. Ground Thrushes and Dusky Crag Martins were seen at the lower levels. A little higher up, where the eucalypts were thinning out, I saw a pair of Little Scaly-bellied Green Woodpeckers tentatively pecking at slim eucalyptus trunks. Cockatoos and parrots nest in the holes of eucalypts in Australia, where there are no woodpeckers at all; the magnificent introduced eucalyptus forests in other parts of the world are usually very poor for birding. Near the very top of Perumal, a Streaked Fantail-Warbler was seen, with no trace of red or rufous on its head; hence I missed the red-headed cisticola. Unidentified pipits and a LBJ (little brown job) completed

the new birds seen on the ascent of Perumal. This tiny all-brown warbler with a brown eyebrow and no other field marks remains a mystery to me still. Prolonged birding on Perumal during the monsoon should yield some birds from local migrations; I consider the green woodpeckers probing at eucalypts simply the luck of the draw!

SELECTED DISTRIBUTIONAL LIST OF PALNI BIRDS

_____ Ceylon _____ Plains and small hills of India _____ Assam
 _____ Nepal and E Himalayas _____ Western Himalayas

.....Grey Tit	.....Tickell's Willow-Warb.
.. Peninsular Scimitar Babbler	. Large Crowned WW
.....Spotted B	. Dusky Crag Martin
.. Quaker B	.. Large Pied Wagtail
.....Indian Blue Chat	.....Cuckoo
... Shama	.....Indian C
.....Blue Rock-Thrush	.....Common Hawk-Cuckoo
.....Red-breasted Flycatcher	.....Indian Tree Pipit
.....Blue-throated F	.....Spotted Piculet
.....Verditer F	.. Green Barget
? Rufous-tailed F	... Brown-throated Spinet
.....Grey-headed F	Swi
.....Paradise F	.....Common Green Pigeon
.....Grey Drongo	. Grey-fronted GreenP
.. ..White-bellied D	.....Green Imperial P
.....Bronzed D	. Painted Bush Quail
	.. .. T.V. Narayana

Some Comments on the Birdlife of Madras City, by Abraham Verghese

In about 48 hours we sighted 57 birds in Madras in the last week of September. This does not reflect the avifaunal status of the City, for it certainly has more species of birds. However, potential places like Manali swamp and Guindy Forest were below our expectation.

Manali swamp has a stretch of water with marsh on either side. The only wader seen was the common sandpiper, quite contrary to Adyar estuary where a number of waders were sighted. In the wet tract, wagtails and pipits were common. But what caught our attention was the conspicuous absence of the bayas, red munias and the blackheaded munias - all seed eaters. Their absence, however, was not surprising as the vegetation around did not support seed yielding grasses. Nor were there suitable nesting sites.

the new birds seen on the ascent of Perumal. This tiny all-brown warbler with a brown eyebrow and no other field marks remains a mystery to me still. Prolonged birding on Perumal during the monsoon should yield some birds from local migrations; I consider the green woodpeckers probing at eucalypts simply the luck of the draw!

SELECTED DISTRIBUTIONAL LIST OF PALNI BIRDS

____ Ceylon ____ Plains and small hills of India ____ Assam
 ____ Nepal and E Himalayas ____ Western Himalayas

.....Grey Tit	.....Tickell's Willow-Warbler
.. Peninsular Scimitar Babbler	. Large Crowned WW
.....Spotted B	. Dusky Crag Martin
.. Quaker B	.. Large Pied Wagtail
.....Indian Blue Chat	.....Cuckoo
... Shama	.....Indian C
.....Blue Rock-Thrush	.....Common Hawk-Cuckoo
.....Red-breasted Flycatcher	....Indian Tree Pipit
.....Blue-throated F	....Spotted Piculet
.....Verditer F	.. Green Barget
? ..Rufous-tailed F	... Brown-throated Spinetail
.....Grey-headed F	Swift
.....Paradise F	.....Common Green Pigeon
.....Grey Drongo	. Grey-fronted GreenP
.. ..White-bellied D	....Green Imperial P
.....Bronzed D	. Painted Bush Quail
	.. .. T.V. Narayana

Some Comments on the Birdlife of Madras City, by Abraham Verghese

In about 48 hours we sighted 57 birds in Madras in the last week of September. This does not reflect the avifaunal status of the City, for it certainly has more species of birds. However, potential places like Manali swamp and Guindy Forest were below our expectation.

Manali swamp has a stretch of water with marsh on either side. The only wader seen was the common sandpiper, quite contrary to Adyar estuary where a number of waders were sighted. In the wet tract, wagtails and pipits were common. But what caught our attention was the conspicuous absence of the bayas, red munias and the blackheaded munias - all seed eaters. Their absence, however, was not surprising as the vegetation around did not support seed yielding grasses. Nor were there suitable nesting sites.

I feel this swamp, which is adjacent to the Government Dairy Farm, can be improved by diversifying the vegetation. Tall reeds near the banks will encourage the weaver birds, water hens and moorhens and perhaps some ducks. On the banks different species of grass seeds can be broadcast to attract finch birds. The Madras Naturalist Society can take up this programme as preliminary step in making Manali a bird refuge.

The Guindy Forest was a disappointment with less than 30 species of birds. The most common ones were the white headed babblers, the redvented bulbuls and redwhiskered bulbuls, tailor birds, ioras, common mynas and roseringed parakeets. The members of the MNS, especially Mr. V Santharam and Mr. Mohan Rao, perhaps, have a better record of the forest. But, the avifauna is certainly not encouraging.

A few reasons could be attributed to this. There is firstly no proper water source in the forest. The officials should dig some ponds and tanks and have birdbaths scattered in the forest.

The ground flora in the forest looked sparse and dry even at this time of the year. Something has to be done to enrichen this.

Members of MNS told me that some birdwatchers had suggested planting of fruit trees to improve bird life here. But, I feel this may not help much, as the abundance of bulbuls and parakeets itself show that fruiting trees are not limiting. Further, by planting more fruiting trees, I wonder what more birds can be attracted? Flowering shrubs and trees, however, will help, at least to augment the numbers of sunbirds.

We were impressed with the members of the Madras Naturalist Society who inspite of diverse interests function in harmony. The birdwatchers in the Society are very enthusiastic. They are yet to tally a checklist for Madras, towards which they are sincerely working. Madras further offers from excellent scope to create bird refuges and to programme other amateur activities.

Golden Oriole's unusual feat, by Prakash Garde

One bright sunny morning, I was sitting on the steps of an old, abandoned swimming pool in the heart of Telenkhedi Gardens at Nagpur, watching a small blue kingfisher catching fish in the mossy water. I was thoroughly engrossed in observing the small bird expertly diving into the water and in a split second - even before the ripples had started forming on the water-surface - rising again to its perch with a small fish in its beak.

Suddenly, I felt, rather than I saw, a bright yellow thing streaking through the air and splashing in the middle of the tank. Before I could fully realise what was happening I saw the 'yellow thing' rise

from the water-surface with water dripping from all over its body. I could now recognise the bird as a Golden Oriole. It rose and perched atop an electric pole alongside the tank and started devouring a small fish it had caught. All wet, it was looking quite funny and miserable with water still dripping from its wings and tail. After disposing of the fish it shook itself thoroughly ruffling its feathers and causing a fine spray of water-droplets which shone brightly in the morning Sun.

The bird spent a brief period preening itself. Then it turned and was now facing the water. I was wondering whether it would repeat its performance and Lo! it did just that! It once again dived into the water making a big splash and rose again with a small fish in its beak. This time, however, it flew into a big tree with thick foliage a hundred yards away and I could observe it no more.

Recently, a friend also narrated a similar incident. He claimed to have seen a very strange type of 'Kingfisher' and described it as similar to a Golden Oriole in size and colours but with a large beak like the Kingfisher's. He saw it swooping down from some height and skimming the surface of a small pool of water. It rose and perched itself on a Babul tree some distance away and it was then that my friend noticed the large beak. Perhaps it was a Golden Oriole which had caught something - most probably a dead fish floating on the water - which my friend had mistaken for its beak.

Correspondence

Studies on Mynas by Drs. A.J. Baker and A. Moeed

In late November Dr. A.J. Baker of the University of Toronto, Canada and Dr. A. Moeed of the Department of Science and Industrial Research, New Zealand visited Bangalore to continue their research on evolution in Common Mynas. This species is especially interesting to people studying evolution because birds from India were introduced by man to such far away places as Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Hawaii and South Africa. Drs. Baker and Moeed have measured large numbers of mynas from these introduced populations, and now want to compare them with measurements from native Indian birds.

As well as taking measurements from Indian Birds, Drs. Baker and Moeed are also conducting genetic studies of Mynas. The aim of this research is to see whether the introduced populations of mynas have evolved new or different forms of genes found in their Indian ancestors. The diet of common mynas is also being examined to determine whether there are regional differences in feeding habits and how the differences might be related to differences in the sizes of the birds.

(When these two gentlemen arrived with their guns at Dodda Gubbi I was taken aback, but soon realised that their intentions were honourable even though it involved the killing of birds. I decided on the questionable step of preventing any shooting in my compound and encouraging them to shoot in neighbouring lands. They had the necessary permit from the Wildlife Warden so no law breaking was involved. 19 birds were collected in this locality and strangely the measurements showed that they were considerably fatter and larger in size than the birds of North India)

Editor

Plover by Rekha Shukla

We saw the nests of Ternlets, Blackwinged Stilts and Kentish Plovers in the small islands in the lake. There were 3 islands but we counted the nests in the smallest island. There were 35 nests of Stilts, 42 nests of Ternlets, 5 nests of Kentish Plover and 18 nests of Red-wattled Lapwing. We did not find any nests of the Little Ringed Plover. We went after 10 a.m. because after this time the birds don't leave the nests to protect the eggs and the chicks from the heat of the sun. Unless the birds were in situ we would not have been able to locate the nests.

When the rains came after a few days we collected the eggs and shifted them to a higher elevation so that they would not be drowned.

Now I have a problem. Can the eggs and chicks collected from one nest survive if they are placed in the nests of other birds in neighbouring islands. If this is not practicable we could try the experiment in the coming year. Can anyone let me have the details? Also I would very much like to know whether the parent birds would be able to identify their eggs and chicks if they are placed elsewhere.

Extract from a circular letter of 5-11-79 to subscribers of WWF from Rajkot by Lavkumar Khachar

A remarkable finale was provided on the last morning for the volunteers, whose dedicated efforts had made this camp a great success, in the form of a spectacular courtship display by a pair of Laggar Falcons. The display was particularly rewarding since this pair had been disturbed last year when some workers repairing the roof had cleaned out their old nest on one of the high balconies of the castle, and the birds, which had regularly used the site since 1956, had not nested, and it was feared they had deserted. In a hope to lure them back, we had an old crow's nest placed on the balcony and their **aeronautical love play** suggested ~~their~~ having accepted the arrangement. Laggar Falcons do not construct their own nests but appropriate those of crows or kites and in this case had requisitioned the site from a pair of White Vultures.

Birdwatching in Burnihat Valley, Assam/Meghalaya - Part I, by Dr. Sas Biswas

Burnihat valley is situated 24 kms south of Gauhati (Assam) and 85 kms north of Shillong (Meghalaya). The Gauhati-Shillong Road (G.S.Road) demarcates the political boundry of Assam towards the east and Meghalaya on the west. In the map the location is NS 91°9' & 92° to 25°3' & 26°1' EW. The configuration is hilly and its elevation ranges between 200 to 400m above sea level. The vegetation comprises of tropical moist deciduous species e.g. *Tetrameles nudiflora*, *Adina cordifolia*, *Stereospermum personatum*, *Cassia fistula*, *Albizia* species, *Derris robusta*, *Premna latifolia*, *Terminalia bellerica*, *Dillenia indica*, *Dillenia pentagyna*, *Lagerstroemia speciosa*, *Schima wallichii*, *Shorea robusta*, and various bamboos and palms, etc.

Due to shifting cultivation (jhumming) forest fire and indiscriminate exploitation of forest wealth for firewood and plywood industries the forest around the locality remains disturbed. However the bird fauna appears to have **withstood the biotic disturbances**.

This note provides a list of some birds I have been observing in this valley for the past 18 months. They have been identified with the aid of Salim Ali's 'Book of Indian Birds' (1972) and 'Field Guide to the Birds of the eastern Himalayas' (1977)

Here is the first enumeration of birds of the valley. Brownheaded Stork-billed Kingfisher, Redvented Bulbul, Scarlet Minivet, Blackheaded Oriole, Cattle Egret, Chestnut Bittern, Spotted Dove, Purple Sunbird, Baya Weaver Bird, Black Drongo, Indian Myna, House Sparrow, Magpie Robin, Jungle Myna, Tailor Bird, Roller, Racket-tailed Drongo, Goldenbacked Woodpecker, Pied Myna, Palm Swift, Jungle Crow, Ashy Swallow-shrike, Redwhiskered Bulbul, Redwattled Lapwing, Shahin Falcon, Blackheaded Munia, Common Indian Nightjar, Common Swallow, White-eye, Blue Cheeked Bee-eater, Spotted Owlet, Grey Junglefowl, Little Grebe, Tree Sparrow, Red-turtle Dove, and Pond Heron.

Miscellaneous Notes by Thomas Gay

1. This season's first Whitethroat seen in our garden at Poona on 1 November.
2. Golden Orioles calling in October and early November. Previously I have never heard them calling after the breeding season in April-May.
3. Nest of Crested Lark with 3 eggs, and the bird sitting, found on a grassy hill-slope at Malavali, District Poona, on 28 October. This extends the recorded nesting season for this bird by some four months.
4. Winter migrants, such as Duck, Terns, etc. arriving late in Poona this year. Can anyone suggest a reason for this?

Occurrence of Redwinged Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator coromandus*) in Vishakapatnam by K.S.R. Krishna Raju.

On 30th March, 79 a Redwinged Crested Cuckoo was spotted in our back-yard. The bird was in a bad condition and evidently being mobbed by Crows. We retrieved it and let it off after sunset into a well wooded portion.

Ripley (1961) mentioned Chotanagpur, Madras, Mysore, Kerala etc., during winter and monsoon. Ali & Ripley (1969) mentioned '....In peninsular India recorded variously as on passage, or a rare stragler, or scarce but regular rainy season or winter visitor, in Kerala, Mysore, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra state, status and movements very imperfectly known.....'

In the absence of any published records, this constitutes the first record of this bird species from Northern Andhra Pradesh. It is further interesting that this record in March probably signifies its return migration route along the East coast, though the species has not been recorded before.

A note on Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) from Ahmednagar (Maharashtra) by D.B. Pawar

It was morning time. Suddenly I heard the song uttered near the road side. It can be rendered as "which-which-which-which or twit-twit-twit-twit." It was uttered often with a short break. The bird was hidden in the grass and I could not find it.

After returning from office at 5 p.m. I saw the bird at a distance of 15 to 20 feet away from the road side.

I stopped for a minute and observed the brown bird having some white spots on its upper side. Suddenly it ran into the grass. Every day I kept a watch on it and I referred the Book of Indian Birds by Salim Ali. I could judge that it was a Rain Quail. I have observed the

the bird throughout Ahmednagar district. It is always in grassy land, and Bajra fields. The frequency of the song is more in the month of August - September.

Najafgarh Jheel by Harkirat S. Sangha

On September 26, 1979, Aditya Arya and I visited Najafgarh Jheel. During normal climatic conditions the water spreads for miles. Unfortunately, this year, due to insufficient rainfall it is dry. During our visit the water was confined to the main drain only.

Earlier records, about the lake, mention large congregations of water birds. But despite these unfavourable conditions we observed the following water birds. Grey Heron, Sarus Crane, Dabchick, Painted Stork, White Ibis, Little Stint, Common Sandpiper, Paddy Bird, Large Egret, Curlew, Little Cormorant, Coot, Blackwinged Stilt, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, and Redwattled Lapwing.

Our most important spotting was that of a Curlew (*Numenius arquata*). We spotted this near the edge of the water. Here, I'd like to quote from Usha Ganguli's book. "The Curlew arrives in October and leaves by the first week of May", she adds, "the extreme dates being October 3 and May 14". We saw it on September 26. So it was a very early arrival.

We saw a few terns, but couldn't identify them. They had black heads and bills and almost black legs.

Insect Control by birds, by Indra Kumar Sharma

Ignorant people consider birds to be pests where as infact they are important controllers of insect pests. I have studied this aspect in agricultural farms around Jodhpur for three years between 1975-78 and some of my findings are summarised below.

Insect pests	Crops damaged	Pest consumer birds
<u>Caterpillars:</u>		
Amsacta moorei	Bajra, Phaseolus aureus Phaseolus acontifolius Cyamopsis tetragonoloba Sesamum indicum	Common Myna, Whitecheeked Bulbul, Redvented Bulbul, Jungle Babbler, Common Babbler, Grey Shrike, Indian Robin, Grey Partridge, Black Drongo, House Sparrow, Blackbellied Finch-Lark.
Athalia lugens Dacus cucurbita	Mustards, Cucumbers	Ibis
Agrotis species (Cut-worms)		Ibis
<u>Beetles</u>		
Adoretus pallens	Bajra, Zizyphus species	Myna, Shrike, Drongo, Indian Robin, Partridge

----- Insect pests	Crops damaged	Pest consuming birds

<u>Aphids:</u>		
Macrosiphum species	Wheat (Triticum spp)	Ashy Wren-Warbler, Indian Wren Warbler
Scizaphus gremium	Wheat	Tailor Bird,
Rhopalosiphum crysimi	Mustards, Cabbage	House Sparrow, Bulbuls
Aphis species	Leguminous crops	Ibis
	Cruciferae crops	
<u>Hoppers:</u>		
Schizstocera gregaria	All Crops	Mynas, Crows, Egrets,
Locusta migratoria		Bulbuls, Drongos,
Chrotogonus species		Shrikes.
<u>Termites:</u>		
Microtermus obesi	Bajra, Wheat,	Partridge, Indian
Odontotermus obesus	Jowar, Zizyphus species	Robin, Mynas, Crows,
Termes species		Babblers, and Sandgrouse.

The table shows that many kinds of birds are consumers of different kinds of pest insects of agricultural crops. One species of bird consumes different orders of pest insects so also some birds have specific choice e.g. egrets prefer flies and hoppers and warblers prefer aphids. Bulbuls, Mynas, the Black Drongo, the Grey Shrike, the Grey Partridge are wide ranging pest consumers, and should be encouraged in farms for biological control of pests.

(to be continued)

Our Contributors

- Mr. T.V. Narayana, c/o. Mr. K. Ramesam, Howard Finley Consultants, 95, V.M. Street, Madras 600 004.
- Mr. Sudhir Vyas, 53, Newal Kishore Road, Lucknow 226001.
- Mr. Prakash Garde, 'Poorva', 229, Rani Laxminagar, Nagpur 440 022.
- Mr. Abraham Verghese, 7, Lakshmaiah Road, Ulsoor, Bangalore 8.
- Shri. D.B. Pawar, Senior Research Assistant, Department of Entomology, M.P.K.V. Rahuri 413722, Ahmednagar.
- Mr. Harkirat S. Sangha, L-10 Rudranorth, St. Stephen's College, Delhi 110 007.
- Mr. K.S.R. Krishna Raju, Saileru Food Products (P) Ltd., Dasapalla Hills, Vishakapatnam 530 003, Andhra Pradesh.
- Miss. Rekha Shukla, Texes, Kumudwadi, Bhavnagar Para, Pin 364003.

Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagawati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur 342020.
 Dr. A.J. Baker, Dr. A. Moeed, c/o. Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park,
 Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C6.
 Mr. Thomas Gay, Dev Kunj, Prabhat Road, Poona 4110 004.
 Dr. SAS. Biswas, Research Officer, Systematic Forest Botany Branch, State
 Forest Service College-cum-Research Centre, Burnihat via Gauhati,
 Assam 793101.
 Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, 14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360 004.

Subscriptions for 1980 have been received from:

Dr. Salim Ali, 46 Pali Hill, Bandra, Bombay 400 050, Rs.200/-;
 Mr. C. Sasikumar, 9, Subash Nagar Colony, Cannanore 670 002, Rs.15/- ;
 Mr. A.C. Mahesh, 78-C3-B Sector, Piplani, Bhopal 462021, Rs.10/-;
 Mr. R. Ramakrishnan, c/o. Atlas Copco (I) Ltd., 853-B, 4th Cross,
 Indiranagar II Stage, Bangalore 560 038, Rs.15/-;
 Mrs. Veronica Doos, 30 Vasant Marg, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi 110 057, Rs.20/-;
 Brig. John P. Anthony (Retd), 'Kusumum', B-116, Sainikpuri, Hyderabad -
 500 594, Rs.16/-;
 Mr. Prakash Garde, 'Poorva', 229, Rani Laxminagar, Nagpur 440022,
 Rs.15/-;
 Mrs. Rhona Ghate, Shivangaon, Nagpur 440 019, Rs.16/-;
 Prof. Dinesh Mohan, Director, CBRI, Roorkie, District Saharapur, Rs.15/-;
 Shri. Sudhir Vyas, 53, Newal Kishore Road, Lucknow 226001, Rs.15/-;
 M.H. Himmatsinhji, Jubilee Ground, Sharad Baug, Bhuj Kutch, Rs.20/-;
 Mrs. I.M. Willis, The Club, Dotacamund 643001, Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu,
 Rs.15/-;
 Mr. K.S. Nataraj, M.Sc., NSS Programme Officer, National College, Jaya-
 nagar, Bangalore 560 011, Rs.15/-;
 Mrs. S. Jameson, Culmore, Coonoor, Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, Rs.15/-;
 Mrs. Jamal Ara, A2, 'Asha Kunj', Opp. Syndicate Bank, Chembur, Bombay
 400 071, Rs.20/-;
 M/s. Prints India, 11, Darya Ganj, New Delhi 110 009, Rs.15/-;
 Brig. R. Lokarajan, Laxmi Nilayam, Road No.7, Banajara Hills, Hyderabad,
 500 034, Rs.15/-;
 Mr. Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazar, Hyderabad 500 012, Rs.10/-;
 Mr. JMT Gibson, Shanti Nivas, Bulab Bari, Ajmer 305001, Rs.16/-;
 The Librarian, Defence Services Staff College, Wellington (Nilgiris),
 South India, 643231, Rs.15/-;
 Capt. S. Prabhala, Dy. General Manager, BEL, Bangalore 560 013, Rs.15/-.